BEYOND THE POLITICS OF RACE

An alternative history of Fiji to 1992

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Beyond the Politics of Race. An alternative history of Fiji to 1992

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Canberra, 1992
For
Amelia Rokotuivuna

and in memory
of
Timoci Uluivuda Bavadra
Acknowledgements

Many people, especially friends in Fiji and Australia, have contributed to this book. Too numerous to name individually, I extend to them all my sincere thanks. I owe, however, a special debt to Ron May, Robbie Robertson, Rob Steven, Jim Anthony and Manfred Bienefeld. For their advice, encouragement and friendship I am deeply grateful. Thanks are also due to Claire Smith, Lulu Turner, Allison Ley and Bev Fraser for their assistance in the production of this book. Most of all I am grateful to my wife Helen and my children, Marcus and Jessica, for their affection and forebearance. For them is reserved my warmest gratitude.

William Sutherland
April 1992
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<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALTA</td>
<td>Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOMAS</td>
<td>Business Opportunity and Management Advisory Service</td>
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<td>BP</td>
<td>British Petroleum (Southwest Pacific) Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIAC</td>
<td>Constitution Inquiry and Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>CSR</td>
<td>Colonial Sugar Refining Company</td>
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<td>FBC</td>
<td>Fiji Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>FDB</td>
<td>Fiji Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>FECA</td>
<td>Fiji Employers Consultative Association</td>
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<td>FIDC</td>
<td>Fiji Investments Development Corporation</td>
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<td>FLP</td>
<td>Fiji Labour Party</td>
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<td>FNP</td>
<td>Fijian Nationalist Party</td>
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<td>FPC</td>
<td>Fiji Pine Commission</td>
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<td>FPSA</td>
<td>Fiji Public Servants Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTUC</td>
<td>Fiji Trade Unions Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>FVB</td>
<td>Fiji Visitors Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td>General Elector</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEA</td>
<td>General Electors Association</td>
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<td>NFP</td>
<td>National Federation Party</td>
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<td>NLDC</td>
<td>Native Land Development Corporation</td>
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<td>NLTB</td>
<td>Native Land Trust Board</td>
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<td>PATA</td>
<td>Pacific Area Travel Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Public Service Commission</td>
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<td>UMC</td>
<td>United Marketing Company</td>
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<td>WUF</td>
<td>Western United Front</td>
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Boundaries - Existing Confederacies

with fourth Confederacy
Introduction

When the democratically-elected Coalition Government of Dr Timoci Bavadra was overthrown in a military coup in May 1987 the world was stunned. Fiji had long been seen as a shining example of stable and democratic government. Now the image was shattered. And in the search for explanations the racialist orthodoxy which for so long predominated in explanations of Fiji politics once again reared its ugly head. Fiji politics was the politics of race, and the crisis of 1987 was just another example of this. In the wake of the Alliance’s defeat, according to this line of argument, Fiji’s paradigmatic multiracial harmony could no longer be sustained because the balance of racial forces had changed fundamentally and unacceptably. Fijians were no longer prepared to tolerate the ‘threat of Indian domination’. Indians ‘controlled’ the economy, now they also had political power. To Fijians this was intolerable. The upheavals of 1987 were therefore explained as an attempt by Fijians to reaffirm and protect the ‘paramountcy of Fijian interests’.

I left Fiji after the May coup and returned for two weeks in the following August. In downtown Suva I met an old and dear friend, a long time supporter of the extremist Fijian Nationalist Party. He had taken part in the April 24 demonstration in Suva organised by the extremist and racist Taukei Movement as part of a wider destabilisation campaign which led eventually to the coup. We talked at length and he explained how tough things had become for him. His income had fallen drastically, prices were much higher, school fees had to be paid, and so on. I then asked what the general talk in the village was, how people were feeling three months after the coup. His response was immediate: ‘Sa dola na mata’, which literally means, ‘The eyes have opened’. There was a feeling, he explained, that for a coup that was supposed to help Fijians it had instead caused immense hardship. People were now beginning to see that the upheavals had benefitted only a small number of Fijians, not Fijians generally. Nearly two years later that view has become even more strongly confirmed by the growing evidence.

It should not be surprising that the critical struggles in post-coup Fiji are intra-Fijian struggles. The key lines of tension are now between chiefs, between tribes, and between commoners and chiefs, eastern and western Fijians, and urban and rural Fijians. Within the trade union movement and the Church Fijians are also divided. And educated Fijian
commoners worry increasingly about the real possibility of their democratic rights being eroded by a proposed constitution which promises to entrench chiefly power even more. This is the critical reality of Fiji today, but the racialist orthodoxy cannot explain it. For on the logic of racialist explanations, the post-coup situation ought to be characterised by Fijian unity. After all, with the ‘Indian factor’ having been removed so to speak, the supposedly primary determinant of conflict - race - is negated, and what should emerge is a happy and contented Fijian race. But this is not the case, and clearly the intra-Fijian conflicts need to be explained in terms other than of race. What is more, it is clear that the origins of these conflicts do not lie just in the post-coup situation. Instead the conflicts are rooted in structural tensions which lie deep in Fiji’s history - tensions which have for a very long time been masked by the politics of race. There is a hidden history which needs to be recovered.

For a long time racialist orthodoxy, ideology and practice hid from our view the fundamental bases and mechanisms of exploitation in Fiji. Now they stare us in the face. Free, as it were, of the confounding influence of race, the present intra-Fijian struggles have served to expose not only a whole series of tensions and contradictions within Fijian society but also, very importantly, a key axis of conflict that cuts right through Fiji society as a whole and whose origins lie in the entry of capitalism into Fiji nearly two centuries ago. That axis of conflict is class. The central task of this discussion, therefore, is to challenge the racialist orthodoxy, recover this long neglected dimension and restore it to its proper place of Fiji’s history.

In challenging the racialist orthodoxy, however, we are not suggesting that racial factors were unimportant or that they have or will become so. Clearly they have a salience, a materiality and pertinence of their own which cannot be explained in terms of class. The same also applies to other factors. Tribal conflict, regional tension and chiefly rivalry, for example, existed before contact with Europeans and although they were also subsequently influenced by emergent class relations, they too have a residual salience which cannot be reduced to class. The argument here, then, is not that class factors explain everything, nor even that they are always the most important causes. The argument is simply that the strongest tendencial forces which have shaped Fiji’s post-contact history have been class ones and that they have assumed predominantly racial forms.

This new interpretation was first developed in my earlier work which was completed in 1984 and which took the historical discussion up to 1980. There I examined the racialist orthodoxy and examined key works by anthropologists, economists, historians, geographers and political scientists which advance racialist explanations. Among these were works by Ali (1980), Ali and Mamak (1979), Anthony (1969),

Running through writings such as these is a pluralist conception which sees Fiji primarily as a plurality of racial groups and which explains social conflict and historical change primarily in racial terms. My main disagreement with the pluralist approach is that it begs fundamental questions: what were the conditions which gave rise to racial plurality and conflict? How and why did racial conflict persist? What were the underlying structures and processes which reproduced racialist ideology and practice?

When, for example, the colonial government recruited indentured workers from India, it did so not because it wanted to make Fiji an even more racially plural society (Europeans were already in the country) but because labour was required by capitalists wishing to develop a sugar industry. The racial tensions which followed in the wake of indenture cannot therefore be understood outside of the needs and imperatives of capitalist development in Fiji. And it is precisely because capitalist relations came to predominate in Fiji that class relations are here seen as the strongest tendential forces which shaped the country's broad trajectory of development.

By the time I was developing this argument in my earlier work, the racialist orthodoxy was already under challenge. The first major break, spearheaded by a small group of local writers, began to appear in the early 1970s. By then the modernizationist approach to Third World development was under increasing attack from dependency and neo-Marxist approaches and it was from these that the local writers drew inspiration. In 1973 Fiji: A Developing Colony of Australia was published. Authored by Amelia Rokotuivuna and others, this pathbreaking work was followed by important contributions from, for example, Jay Narayan (1976; 1984), John Samy (1977), Wadan Narsey (1979) and Jone Dakuvula (1980). But major contributions also came from non-Fijian writers like Stephen Britton (1979; 1983), Michael Moynagh (1981) and Richard Peet (1980). The collective importance of these works lies in the way they reshaped the debate on Fiji by introducing the discourse of dependency and class. Against the racialist orthodoxy, they offered alternative explanations in terms of external dependency, foreign control, class interests and so on.

Despite my disagreements with them, my 1984 study was influenced by these works and I saw my work as a further contribution to the new critical tradition which they had started. My original intention was to investigate the state and capitalist development in post-
independence Fiji. As I sought to locate that planned project in its wider historical context, however, I found myself increasingly at odds with existing accounts of Fiji's history. It was then that I abandoned my original plan and embarked instead on a reinterpretation of Fiji's post-contact history.

The only work that was akin to my new project in terms of its historical scope and broad theoretical approach was Jay Narayan's (1984). Written from a dependency perspective, it threw new light on Fiji's history but it also suffered from many of the shortcomings of dependency approaches. In particular it lacked a sustained analysis of the dynamics of class relations in Fiji and of the role of the state. My study sought to provide such an analysis.

Since the mid 1980s the critical literature on Fiji has grown and there is now greater recognition of the importance of class in Fiji's development process. This is evident in the burgeoning literature on post-coup Fiji, although writers differ in the weight they place on class-based explanations of the crisis. A review of that literature is provided by MacDonald (1990). Unlike the other accounts, the present study argues that, as with the broad historical trajectory of development in Fiji, the strongest trendential forces behind the crisis of 1987 were class ones and, furthermore, that this is also true of the general trend of development since the crisis.

As far as the coups are concerned, then, the argument here is that what appeared to be a racial struggle was in fact a struggle waged by a small group of Fijians who stood to lose the most by the defeat of the Alliance Party — the Fijian chiefly elite and the senior echelons of the Fijian state bourgeoisie. In order, however, better to understand the class character of that battle, and also of the present struggles and where they are leading, it is necessary to go back in time and beyond the racialist orthodoxy.

We need to recover Fiji's hidden history. Only then will it be possible to see more clearly how the masses in Fiji have been oppressed and kept divided so that the elite might prosper. Only then will it become clear that there is another reality 'beyond the politics of race'.
PART I:

FIJI TRANSFORMED c.1800-1874
Chapter 1

Structural Change in Pre-colonial Fiji

Considerable gaps exist in our knowledge about conditions in Fiji prior to contact with Europeans. Most written materials are concerned with either the remote past, particularly the original peopling of the islands, or the post-contact era. Little is known of the intervening period which Thomson, displaying the ethnocentrism and paternalism typical of many of Fiji's early historians, described as 'the centuries which lie between the age of myth and the age of history' (Thomson 1908/1981:21).

To the early Europeans, the most outstanding feature of Fijian society was recurrent warfare and accordingly this figured most prominently in the early historical writings.1 Later accounts also devoted a great deal of attention to indigenous warfare; this is illustrated, for example, by the tribal histories which are preserved in the records of the Native Commission (France 1969:10). They are full of accounts of turmoil and although peaceful interludes are also recorded the overriding impression they project of precapitalist Fiji is one of social upheaval.

Given that the oral sources on which these histories were based were replete with tales of hostility and unrest, their bias is understandable. But it would be wrong to conclude that the normal and universal condition of precapitalist Fiji was that described in the tales. This is the kind of error against which France rightly cautions (ibid.:13-14). For example, the extensive genealogies of the hill tribes of central Viti Levu which Brewster (1922:72, 73) documented tell of times when 'fighting was unknown and a profound peace prevailed'. Yet it is certainly true that when the first Europeans settled in Fiji the country was embroiled in violence and turmoil.

Why, then, was there so much indigenous warfare? And what did this social ferment signify? We are not interested here in the details and

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1 See for example, Thomson (1908/1981); Williams (1858/1982); Waterhouse (1866); im Thurn and Wharton (1925/1982). See also the following later works: Deane (1921); Morrell (1960); and Orr (1977).
structural transformation. We also argue that the fundamental causes of that process of change lay in the inherent contradictions of precapitalist Fiji. But to know what those contradictions were, why they caused conflicts, and how those conflicts in turn produced structural change in Fijian society, we need to know something about the general structure of precapitalist Fiji. With that, we will better understand how and why it was that capitalism was able, upon its entry, to influence that process of change and eventually come to predominate.

Structure, contradiction and transformation

Precapitalist Fiji was composed of small and relatively autonomous social groupings which have been referred to variously as tribes, chiefdoms, kingdoms and states. The use of these sorts of labels underlines the way in which the early writers on Fiji were preoccupied with appearances — with forms of social organization. Fijian societies were seen in terms of their degree of stratification, level of political development, land tenure practice, kinship, and so on. Importantly, there was also the appearance of internal cohesion within Fijian societies. And yet at the same time there was the contradictory reality of inter-tribal warfare. How, then, is that contradiction to be explained?

The inability of early writers to provide adequate explanations stems from their preoccupation with appearances and their consequent failure to explain adequately what we will argue was the fundamental contradiction in Fijian societies — the exploitation of commoners by chiefs. They acknowledged such exploitation but explained it in functional terms.

‘Traditional’ Fijian societies, the usual argument ran, were organized along ‘communalistic’ lines and chief-commoner relations were functional in that they served to maintain the unity and cohesion of the society. Chiefs provided protection and subjects reciprocated with deference and material tribute. Additionally, chiefly rule also depended upon chiefs demonstrating concern for the welfare of their followers. One very tangible way of doing that was to return to the commoners a portion of their material tribute. This served to enhance the prestige of the chief and strengthen the loyalty and support of his followers. Thus the cohesion and unity of the society was maintained.

However, this kind of functionalist explanation is inadequate because it says nothing about the material basis of chiefly power. Real power springs not from ideas or beliefs about who should or should not rule but from some independent, material foundation. It is true that concern for subjects could help to sustain chiefly rule but such concern is not the foundation of chiefly power. After all, many people show caring and concern for others but they do not all become chiefs. Where,
complexities of particular wars or battles but in the broader social forces which produced the general state of war. The argument we develop is that the wars gave expression to an underlying process of then, does chiefly power originate? What, in other words, is its material foundation?

Chiefs, like anyone else, had to survive physically. They needed food, clothing and shelter. But they did not produce these material things; their subjects did. It was the commoners who laboured and produced the wealth of the society. To meet their material requirements of existence, then, the chiefs simply appropriated the surplus production of the commoners and it is in this sense that we speak of exploitation by chiefs. It is precisely in this relation of exploitation that the most basic contradiction of Fijian society is found — the appropriation by one class (the chiefs) of the material wealth produced by another (the commoners).

The mechanism of wealth appropriation by the chiefs was the payment of tribute. This took two main forms — lala and sevu, whereby chiefs commanded certain types of labour and were given the best produce. As Williams put it, 'In Fiji, subjects do not pay for their land but a kind of tax on all their produce, besides giving their labour occasionally in peace, and their service, when needed, in war' (1858/1982:40).

But how and why did the chiefs get away with all this? What was the material basis of their power which allowed them such influence? In short it was their control over the most important means of production, land.

In general, working implements were individually-owned but they were also subject to the powerful and socially-sanctioned practice of kerekere, which essentially was a form of customary borrowing that carried an obligation to reciprocate sometime in the future. With land, however, the situation was different, for although there appears to have been a small degree of private ownership (see Clammer 1973; France 1969), the predominant practice was for land to be held collectively. Land immediately contiguous to a family home was the exclusive preserve of family members but land beyond the immediate area was held collectively by the wider social unit to which the family belonged. In general, the landholding unit was the mataqali (there were exceptions) and access to mataqali land was secured through the consent of the mataqali chief. That control over land was the material basis of chiefly power.

Of course, exploitative relations are always problematic because the danger always exists that the exploited might rebel. For the dominant class, therefore, it helps a great deal if the exploitative aspect of the chiefs’ dominance can be hidden. How was this possible in precapitalist Fiji? The answer lies in the form of social organization and the key to our explanation is the mataqali.

In general, Fijian societies were organized along the following lines. Elemental patrilineal descent groups, i tokatoka, combined to
form the primary division of the village, the mataqali. Mataqali which shared a common line to an ancestor god formed a yavusa and the various yavusa within particular localities combined to form a wider body politic, vanua. The latter in turn were joined, often by conquest, to form the widest political unit, matanitu, and there were three — Burebasaga, Kubuna and Tovata. (Referred to variously as states, governments or confederacies, these traditional political alignments groupings became an important factor in the aftermath of the May coup.)

As the primary line of division at the village level, the mataqali became the major determinant of a person’s place in the wider social structure. One resided in a village but one’s place in the broader structure was determined by the mataqali to which one belonged. The mataqali therefore served as primary basis for individual attachment and identification, so that although commoners deferred to the mataqali chief, their prime attachment was to the group. They belonged to and identified with their mataqali, not their turaga ni mataqali (mataqali chief). The group, not the group leader, served as the primary referent of social organization.

With social relations structured around and mediated through this very group-centred form of social organization, the exploitative nature of chief-commoner relations became obscured. In other words, Fijian forms of social organization presented an appearance of social cohesion while hiding an underlying reality of chiefly exploitation.

Although control over land was a powerful basis of chiefly authority, chiefly rule was more likely to persist if it could be legitimized politically and ideologically. That is, chiefly rule would simply be much easier if people believed that only the chiefs could and should rule. What, then, were its major ideological and political foundations?

The most important ideological prop of chiefly power was mana. A chief’s mana derived from a special relationship which he claimed to have with an ancestor-god, and by virtue of the spiritual authority so bestowed upon him, he was tabu or sacred. Placed above mere mortals, he was accorded the greatest respect — a respect which had as one of its critical dimensions the belief that manual labour was beneath the dignity of his position. Supposedly charged with a divinely-ordained task of ruling, chiefs were not meant to engage in the drudgery of producing food, clothing and shelter. Those were tasks for lesser people whose obligations stretched to providing the material requirements of their rulers.

To maintain their mana chiefs had to demonstrate concern for the welfare of their subjects and from their position of power and privilege that was a relatively easy thing to do. For unlike commoners who had to spend hours toiling, the chiefs had much free time to talk, listen,
abistrate, counsel and so on. Also, because they could not consume all the produce given to them as tribute, they returned some of it to the people and so increased their prestige further. Thus it was not difficult to appear to be caring. This is not to suggest that chiefs were not genuinely concerned about the welfare of their people. The point, simply, is that chiefs were well-placed to do what was necessary in order to maintain their mana and hence their power.

The scope for demonstration of chiefly concern was wide and in that regard mention should be made of two cornerstones of customary social practice, kerekere and solevu. Kerekere, occasional borrowing which required reciprocation in the future, and solevu, organized exchanges between villages, were institutionalized practices by which people could secure items which they either could not produce themselves or could not produce in sufficient quantities. Crucial to the reciprocal satisfaction of material needs, these forms of social exchange were given great importance. And with prestige being largely a function of generosity, group-giving was often highly competitive.

At the level of appearance, therefore, the widely-held view that Fijian society was 'egalitarian' and 'group-oriented' is understandable. But beneath the apparent generosity lies a reality of inequality and exploitation — a few actually got far more than others. The chiefs, who produced very little of the community's wealth, received a disproportionately large share. By returning some of that share to their subjects, they were able to increase their mana and strengthen their dominance. As long as the level of chiefly exploitation did not become unbearable, the position of chiefs remained reasonably secure. Yet there were demands and stresses which increased the possibility of further exploitation. Chiefs were tempted to improve their lifestyle, their functionaries and sycophants had to be catered for, larger populations meant greater demand for land and so on. In those kinds of situations, increased tribute could be secured either by making greater demands on the producers or by military conquest — or both. But war entailed the additional burden of having to contend with rival chiefs who themselves were faced with precisely the same sorts of internal contradictions. Warfare, therefore, superimposed a secondary contradiction on the primary one. Of course, the fruits of victory could be great — more land could be secured and the number of tribute-paying subjects increased. Equally importantly, success in battle enhanced the victorious chief's reputation as a protector. Military prowess and success therefore served as a political legitimator of chiefly rule.

This, then, is a brief account of the hidden contradictions of precapitalist Fiji, contradictions which propelled the country along a path of structural transformation violently manifested through tribal warfare. However, before considering how that process of change was
affected by the arrival of Europeans, the broad picture of precapitalist Fiji presented here needs to be qualified because there were significant regional differences — differences which are particularly pertinent insofar as they have persisted to the present day.

Differences in social stratification were marked between the eastern part of the group on the one hand and the west and interior of Viti Levu on the other. Stratification was more highly developed in the east, due in part to the much stronger Polynesian influence there. The eastern region had a much longer history of contact with Polynesia, particularly Tonga, and over the years new goods and skills were introduced. That raised the level of development in the east and led to more uneven development in the country as a whole. But the Tongans also brought military skills and technology which often were superior to that existing in Fiji, and in time Tongan chiefs, notably Ma'afu, established themselves in positions of power. They also introduced Tongan hierarchical divisions. So it is not surprising that eastern Fiji became even more highly stratified than other regions.

In western Viti Levu, for example, it appears that emphasis on rank was rather less marked, and even less so among the hill tribes of the interior (Norton 1972: chapter 3). Of the latter Brewster argues that although members of the clan were expected to die for it and sacrifice themselves, when necessary, for the chief, ‘all men were free and equal, and tyranny and oppression not to be born with’ (1922:71). That is probably exaggerated but it does suggest that hierarchical divisions were not as great in the interior as they were in eastern Fiji.

There were also differences in political organization. Whereas the lower-level social units — *i tokatoka, mataqali,* and *yavusa* — existed universally, the wider political groupings — *vanua* and *matanitu* — did not. By the time of contact at the turn of the nineteenth century, *matanitu* in particular were peculiar to eastern Fiji. By way of contrast, the largest stable political grouping in Nadroga in western Viti Levu was the *vanua,* and in the interior hill country it was the *yavusa* (Norton 1972:114-116). Again these differences probably owed much to the greater Tongan influence in the east (ibid.: chapter 3) but it also had to do with the relative isolation of the west. With the densely-forested Nakauvadra Range running north-south down the middle of Viti Levu, contact between east and west was often difficult.

Importantly, however, in the first fifty years or so after contact, political alignments came to be centred largely around three confederacies (*matanitu*) — Tovata, Burebasaga and Kubuna. (See Map 1.) In Chapter 8, we shall see how these traditional lines of

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2 There was some Tongan influence in Nadroga province also.
Structural change in pre-colonial Fiji

political allegiance resurfaced as a major source of tension in the intra-Fijian struggles of post-coup Fiji.

There were also variations in land tenure practice (France 1969; Clammer 1973; Derrick 1946), so that while the predominant practice was for land to be held by the mataqali, there were exceptions. In some places, for example, it was held by i tokatoka (France 1969:112). What is more, it appears that there were also regional differences in the understanding of these concepts (ibid.)

These regional variations are important because they hint at the complexities of Fijian societies. For our purposes, however, they are noted mainly to identify the historical roots of a very important regional cleavage which continues to this day, but which has been exacerbated by uneven capitalist development and has become an increasingly important factor in post-coup Fiji.

Regional variations notwithstanding, there was in precapitalist Fiji a hierarchical and exploitative social structure that was common to all the societies. At the apex of that structure were chiefs who increasingly waged war. The turmoil into which they plunged the country had reached new heights by the time the first Europeans arrived.

As we have argued, indigenous warfare was the visible manifestation of a process of profound structural change, the root causes of which lay in the contradictions and antagonisms inherent in the exploitative system of social relations that separated chief from commoner. It is true that in particular conflicts factors like revenge, vindictiveness and jealousy were important. But we are not concerned here with the details of specific wars or battles. We are instead concerned primarily with the strongest tendential forces which produced structural change. What, then, were some of the more critical historical developments in that process of change?

It is believed that the Fijians originally settled in the north of Viti Levu and oral sources tell of two early streams of migration from the northern coast of Viti Levu, one sweeping downwards towards the southeastern coast, the other across the strait to the second-largest island, Vanua Levu. Subsequent migrations outwards, together with waves of migration from Tonga, led to the peopling of the smaller islands in the east and south of the group. Considerable intercourse, mainly in the form of exchange of goods, existed between the various communities but there is little evidence of early expansionism, and it was not until the eighteenth century that the first signs of power concentration on a large scale began to emerge.

Some time in the early years of the eighteenth century an event ‘that was destined to have a tremendous influence on the political destiny of the islands’ occurred (Thomson 1908/1981:22). There appears to have been a ‘major upheaval’ among the inland communities of Viti Levu and although there is no hard evidence, nor even a tradition which
might throw some light on its causes, Thomson speculates, not altogether implausibly, that the need for new lands might have been the main reason.

Among the emigrants to the southern coast of Viti Levu were members of the Bau tribe who settled on the southeast coast between the leading societies of that region, Rewa and Verata. The Bauans were renowned for their fierce independence and military prowess and soon they were continually at war with their neighbours. After all, they had to secure the material means of their subsistence and that meant taking from others. Their success owed much to their courage and military skill and by the middle of the nineteenth century Bau had emerged as the leading political centre in eastern Fiji.

Similar struggles were also being waged in other parts of the country and for essentially the same sorts of reasons. They too left their imprint on the changing face of Fiji politics. But in the flux and fluidity of eighteenth century Fiji, the outcome of war was largely indeterminate as 'insignificant states waxed to importance [and] leading states suffered eclipse or waned into obscurity and servitude' (Derrick 1946:22). It was not until the following century that large and powerful political groupings appeared. When that happened the more powerful chiefly classes were better able to contain the contradictions inherent in their own societies and also the secondary contradictions arising from rivalries between chiefs.

Thrown, then, into turmoil by the expansionist designs of rival chiefly classes, Fiji at the turn of the century was caught up in a process of profound social change. Conflict grew, small societies gave way to larger ones, and power become more and more concentrated. But those transitional struggles had not yet come to a determinate conclusion at the time of capitalist penetration and in their attempts to reach such a conclusion the vying chiefs sought assistance from the first agents of capitalism in Fiji — the Europeans.

European contact: origins of capitalist penetration

By the beginning of the 1800s mercantile trade between Australia and China had reached new heights and it was around that time that a schooner, the Argo, was wrecked on a reef in Fiji during its return voyage from China to Australia. Some of the survivors are believed to have been the first white men to live among Fijians and they were joined soon after by survivors of other wrecks and by 'deserters, marooned sailors and derelict scourings of the ports of the Old World' (ibid.:37).

A survivor of the Argo, Oliver Slater, had seen sandalwood growing on the coast of Bua Bay in Vanua Levu and later took news of it to Port Jackson, New South Wales. As the news spread, a rush of
fortune hunters quickly set in. Ships from Port Jackson, Calcutta and the New England ports of America soon arrived in increasing numbers. Sandalwood was eagerly sought in China and before long Fiji was integrated into the growing triangular trade between China, the Pacific and the northwest coast of America. Profits from the sandalwood trade were extremely lucrative, averaging 600 per cent but rising much higher in the peak years of 1808 and 1809. The ruthlessness and unscrupulous practices of the visiting traders have been well documented (see Williams 1858/1982; France 1969; Derrick 1946).

A major consequence of the sandalwood trade was the introduction of firearms, the means of violence without which the successful penetration of capitalism would not have been possible. Charles Savage, a survivor of the wrecked sandalwood ship Eliza, managed to salvage some of the ships supply of arms and introduced them to the chiefdom of Bau. But how precisely the introduction of firearms changed the face of Fiji politics is a matter of dispute. Some argue that it intensified internal warfare while others, like France, say that it served merely to consolidate the influence of chiefs who had already established themselves in positions of power. Whatever the merits of the opposing views, there can be no doubt that firearms added a whole new dimension to the process of social transformation that was already in motion. In one way or another, access to firearms bore upon the fortunes of the rival chiefs.

The sandalwood trade lasted only ten years but it opened the way to a much larger trade in bêche-de-mer. Among the wealthy classes in China, demand for the sea slug was great and by 1829 the trade in bêche-de-mer reached new heights. Around that time too, whaling in Fiji waters had developed into a sizeable and profitable activity dominated by whalers from Port Jackson and New England. By 1840 both whaling and the trade in bêche-de-mer had declined. By then, however, Fiji was already caught up in a process of transformation by capitalist relations.

The traders were able to secure their labour requirements by working through the chiefs. Sandalwood trees had to be felled, cut to size and transported to the ships and the procurement and curing of bêche-de-mer was also a highly organized activity, often involving upwards of three hundred people (Ward 1972). Through their involvement in the capitalist labour process, Fijians were being drawn increasingly into capitalist relations. Labouring under the constant supervision of white overseers, they had their first taste of capitalist discipline. Also, the scale of operations was such that Fijians were

\[\text{3} \quad \text{France (1969:22). Leading exponents of the opposing view include} \quad \text{Derrick (1946:44-47); Legge (1958:11); and Burns (1963:153).}\]
often away from their villages for long periods. Inevitably, therefore, there was growing pressure on the precapitalist system of production. Capitalist production relations, in other words, were beginning to condition the precapitalist ones. In the 1860s they would come to predominate.

The early period of capitalist penetration was important for another major reason: it saw the implantation of various political and ideological forms of capitalist relations.

Dependent as they were for their survival on Fijian beneficence, the early survivors were forced to conform to local custom and practice and in time they learned the local language. It is not surprising, therefore, that they played key roles in the political and ideological transformation that was about to unfold with the arrival of the traders, missionaries and the later waves of white immigrants.

As interpreters for and agents of the traders, they helped to expose Fijians to the fundamentals of capitalist economics and practice. For the Fijians, items like sandalwood and bêche-de-mer had only use value but soon they were being introduced to the concept of exchange value. As France (1969:22) put it, ‘[t]raditional economics had been based on public displays of largesse and the open acknowledgement that goods or services had a specific value attached to them was foreign to Fijian ideas’. Labour too was now being presented in a new light. Previously work was undertaken to meet subsistence needs, communal obligations or tributary dues. Now, however, it was being undertaken as part of an agreement which provided for compensation. Initially payment was in kind but later it would take the form of money.

These ideas and practices were soon reinforced by missionary activity. Upon their arrival at Lakeba on 12 October 1835, Fiji’s first missionaries, William Cross and David Cargill, were promised a piece of land and temporary houses by the local chief. After selecting a site outside the village and having the villagers build their home, Cargill and Cross duly set about erecting fences around it. That act had enormous significance. Indeed, it represented a fundamental challenge to the very foundations of Fijian social relations because it symbolized the introduction of private ownership. Here before Fijian eyes was the first visible sign of the new order. But more was to come.

Believing that Fijians were locked in a state of spiritual darkness and unredeemed depravity, the missionaries plunged headlong and with great zeal into the task of rescuing the natives. That not only undermined local religions, it also paved the way for the introduction of bourgeois law.

In order for Christianity to succeed, Christian morals had to be enforced and to that end the missionaries set about winning for the church a place in the highest levels of the Fijian hierarchy, a goal which they achieved with some distinction in the eastern part of the country.
With that success behind them, they drew up 'rules for civil government' at Viwa in October 1847. They realized that the rules would need the approval of the chiefs and their first target was the Christian chiefs. Unfortunately for them, however, the chiefs did not favour the rules. Nevertheless, the very existence of the rules prompted a few experiments in bourgeois legal procedure (ibid.:32). In particular, the introduction of bourgeois legal concepts cleared the way for attempts to 'legalize' land dealings. That began to happen in the 1840s and, inevitably, the rate of land alienation increased rapidly and peaked in the 1860s.

These, then, were the sorts of political and ideological changes which facilitated the entrenchment of capitalist relations in Fiji. They helped the first seeds of capitalism to germinate. Ahead lay the next stage of the development of capitalism in the country — a 15-year period which saw the firm establishment of capitalist agriculture and at the same time marked the transition to the dominance of capitalism.

Transition to capitalist dominance

By the end of the 1850s the European community was still small and although a few were engaged in coconut planting, the major economic activity was merchant trading. However, this was to change over the next decade.

The American Civil War produced world-wide cotton shortages which in turn prompted industrial capital in Britain to search for alternative supplies from other parts of the Empire. Cotton was already being grown in Fiji and at the request of the Manchester Cotton Growers' Association, the Secretary of State for the Colonies commissioned a botanist, Berthold Seeman, to investigate the potential of Fiji cotton. Seeman's favourable report, together with rumours of pending annexation, sparked off a sudden influx of white settlers from Australia and New Zealand, an influx that soon developed into a 'rush' when a trade depression hit Australia in the late 1860s. In addition to aspiring capitalists, these waves of immigration also brought fugitives from justice and other undesirables. With their (often limited) capital, they came in search of land and labour and in the course of the cotton boom the foundations of a capitalist-dominated, export-oriented agricultural economy were firmly cemented.

The boom lasted for only five years but in that time cotton overtook coconut products as the main export commodity. In 1864, for example, coconut oil and fibre brought in £15,350 as against £3,260 for cotton. Three years later, those figures changed dramatically to £3,260 and £34,004 respectively. Proportionately, that represented a drop for coconut products from 77.5 per cent to 8 per cent of total export earnings compared with an increase from 15.2 per cent to 85.1 per cent.
for cotton (Derrick 1946:160). But the cotton boom had even more far-reaching effects:

The development of planting on a large scale drew with it the paraphernalia of commerce — the establishment of trading houses, which not only provided the mercantile services of the community but also acted as credit institutions, financing the extension of planting; the growth of a busy harbour; the appearance of a small professional community; and the rest. This was very different from the commerce in native produce which had been carried on before the planting began, and represented rather the equipment of a vigorous young society [in which] Levuka...became the thriving centre of the commercial activities of the group (Legge 1958:46-47; also see Derrick 1946:194).

In class terms, a white bourgeoisie consisting of three distinct fractions — plantation capital, commercial capital and a small professional class — had begun to crystallize and shape Fiji’s history in quite significant ways. That influence would become even more profound as the ever-increasing demands of the white bourgeoisie put immense pressure on precapitalist social relations and the chiefly class became increasing unable to cope. The balance of class forces was beginning to tilt as the transition to capitalist dominance gathered momentum.

The vast increase in land alienation during the 1860s has been well documented and so too the often unscrupulous practices of plantation capital as it searched for cheap labour (Ward 1969; Derrick 1946: chapter XIV; Legge 1958: chapter 3). Although some labour was secured through deals with the chiefs, many Fijians were reluctant to work in the plantations. To make up for the shortfall, planters turned to the pernicious labour traffic from other Pacific Islands that came to be known as blackbirding (Derrick 1946: chapter XV; also see Parnaby 1972 and Corris 1970).

As they jostled for land and labour, white capitalists resorted to all sorts of malpractices and ‘acts of tyranny’. But these perpetrators of ‘chaos and lawlessness’ were identified by their race (European) rather than their class (capitalist). That kind of identification was very important because it obscured the fact that the main reason for white lawlessness was the pursuit of capitalist interests. White lawlessness, in other words, was perpetrated not so much in defence of white interests but rather in pursuit of capitalist interests. For the bourgeoisie as a whole, however, the resulting chaos had a contradictory effect. Capitalist production, they realized, depended for its success on order, political stability, the existence of a bourgeois legal system, and effective law enforcement agencies. Nowhere was this more poignantly
demonstrated than in the struggles over land, and in particular the form of land ownership. As France put it:

The planters’ fences, armed labour and ‘No Trespassing’ notices gradually forced upon Fijians the realization that land had an intrinsic value and could be ‘owned’...[But as] European notions of real property were slow to take root among Fijians, there was an increasing demand from the planter for European institutions of government to keep them in absolute possession (1969:53-54).

It was very clear to the embryonic bourgeoisie that if capitalism was to become dominant, there would have to be a bourgeois state. They therefore proposed the establishment of a ‘native government aided by the counsels of respectable Europeans’ (Derrick 1946:158). Three attempts at constituting bourgeois government followed soon afterwards — in 1865, 1869 and 1871. (For discussions of these experiments, see ibid.; France 1969: chapters 5, 6; and Legge 1958: chapter IV). Plagued, however, with suspicion, hostility and conflicting interests, and based as they were on constitutional principles that were manifestly inappropriate for Fiji at that time, all three attempts failed. At root, intra-capitalist rivalry was a major reason for the failure.

At the time of the first two experiments, plantation capital was the strongest fraction of the bourgeoisie and therefore figured most prominently in the two ill-fated ‘governments’. With the collapse of the cotton industry following the sharp drop in the London cotton price in 1870, plantation capital weakened considerably. Commercial capital then became the dominant fraction and, therefore, was the major force in the third government — the ‘Cakobau Government’ of 1871. As Derrick (1946:197) put it, ‘the centre of political gravity shifted from the country to the town’. On the other hand, the bonds which held the fractions of capital together remained strong and that is shown very clearly by the response of the Cakobau government to the needs of plantation capital.

International humanitarian pressure which followed in the wake of the abolition of slavery eventually forced Britain to compel its subjects in Fiji to abandon their abusive labour practices, which by this time included the use of forced labour and slaves (ibid.; also see Young 1984:7). Confronted with the need to find new and more acceptable methods of drawing Fijians into wage employment, the Cakobau government introduced poll and labour taxes and other labour arrangements. The tax system produced much-needed revenue, of course, but the real intention behind it is unmistakeable: ‘Under the Cakobau Government...the system of taxation of Fijians had been not so much a revenue measure as a means of providing labour for white
Beyond the Politics of Race

planters' (Roth 1953:45). Capitalists will compete with each other but when their common interests as a class require it, they close ranks.

The Cakobau government lasted only two years and with its demise capitalist anxiety and desperation intensified. Capitalism had become more and more entrenched in Fiji but the transition to capitalist dominance could not be completed without a strong and sympathetic capitalist state. The white bourgeoisie did not have long to wait.

Crisis and state formation: the annexation of Fiji

By the end of the Cakobau government, the devious and disreputable practices of the settlers had given rise to such an intolerable situation that the governor of New South Wales openly attacked Europeans in Fiji:

> [t]he white settlers are striving to... reduce Fijians to serfdom and a feud has begun by Her Majesty's subjects whose principal object is to kill off the Fijians and acquire by murder, treachery and fraud their lands.....They are incapable of exercising the privileges of self-government with justice or with any regard for the welfare of the great bulk of the population (quoted in Khan 1975:48).

The deteriorating social situation was worsened by the fact that trade was at a virtual standstill. The country was on the verge of bankruptcy and the level of discontent was approaching dangerously high levels. It is not surprising, therefore, that the call went out again for Britain to colonize Fiji. The clamour for annexation had first been made as early as the 1860s; now it was repeated with increased vigour. This time Britain responded positively. On 10 October 1874 Fiji was ceded to Britain.

On outward appearances, the colonization of Fiji was the result of the chaos and instability instigated by white British subjects. This is certainly the argument advanced in standard accounts of Britain’s colonization of Fiji. For Britain to have continued to stand idly by while its subjects wreaked havoc on the Fijian race would have been morally wrong. Britain had a responsibility to protect the helpless natives from its lawless subjects and it acted on that responsibility. The argument here, however, is that the real causes of annexation were different and to find them we need to break through the whole ideology of British benevolence.

Britain has been referred to as a 'reluctant colonizer', a view which has some merit when we consider that offers of cession were made in the 1850s and were rejected. But the main reason for rejection was that Fiji did not promise the kind of economic or strategic advantage which
might have warranted annexation. When Britain initially chose to stay out of Fiji, the local white bourgeoisie made two attempts in the 1860s to form a government. They failed. Then came the new influx of Australian capital in 1870/71, followed by yet another attempt at forming a government. By 1874, however, the situation in Fiji was rather different from when Britain first refused to colonize. There were now more Europeans in the country; more importantly, there were more capitalists and because many were from Australia it is not surprising that some of the strongest calls for British annexation came from Australia (Derrick 1946:199, 222, 235).

The argument here, then, is that the colonization by Britain was linked to the process of structural transformation in Fiji, and in particular to the development of capitalism there. By the early 1870s, the transition to capitalist dominance was virtually complete but it could not reach total fruition without the establishment of a capitalist state. The increasing instability of the early 1870s heightened the urgent need for its completion. The successful consolidation of capitalist relations in Fiji, in other words, depended critically on the establishment of a capitalist state. It is in those terms that Britain’s intervention needs to be understood. British ‘benevolence’ was not the real reason for annexation on 10 October 1874, it was the justification.

With the installation of a capitalist state, the way was open for capitalist dominance. Ahead lay 96 years of colonial capitalism based on sugar and dominated by Australian capital. In the history of class conflict that was about to unfold, class tensions would be subsumed even more than ever beneath the politics of race. We say ‘subsumed even more’ because class conflict had already begun to assume a racial form. The contradiction between the chiefly class and the commoners remained an essentially Fijian phenomenon but the contradiction between capital and labour had a different racial face — capital was European, labour Fijian. Soon, however, labour would become predominantly Indian.

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4 Discussions of the early offers can be found in Ward (1948: chapter V); Legge (1958: chapter 2); and Derrick (1946: chapters XII, XXII).
PART II:

RACE AND CLASS IN THE COLONIAL ECONOMY

c.1874-1960
Chapter 2

Exploitation in the Colonial Economy

The immediate and most urgent task confronting Sir Arthur Gordon, Fiji’s first substantive governor, upon his arrival in Fiji in 1875 was the need to establish an effective system of social control. There was the possibility that the political chaos before cession might develop again; the absence of regular British troops in Fiji did not help matters, nor of course the simple fact that Fijians greatly outnumbered the white population. After all the Maori-Pakeha wars in Aotearoa (New Zealand) were still fresh in Gordon’s mind. Consequently Gordon realized that in order to govern effectively, indigenous support was vital. Only through the chiefs could Fiji be ‘most peaceably, cheaply and easily governed’ (quoted in Gillion 1962:7). On this occasion colonial economic aims conveniently dovetailed with the ideology of British benevolence.

Gordon was, of course, imbued with the ideology of British benevolence. He too saw Fijians as emerging from a state of savage barbarism and incapable of coping with the rigours of modern civilization. An arrangement therefore had to be devised for their protection until such time as they were ready for the modern world. But such an arrangement could only work with Fijian support. As he put it:

the more native the native policy is retained, native agency employed, and changes avoided until naturally and spontaneously called for... [the less likely is] the Fijian to perish from the face of the earth (quoted in Heath 1974:87).

This rule was of course a convenient justification for a system of ‘indirect rule’ whose real purpose was the containment of any potential indigenous threat to colonial rule. In reality, therefore, protection was given not so much to the Fijian people but to colonial capitalism.

Nevertheless, Gordon’s system of native administration certainly gave the appearance of protecting the Fijians. Here was a set of laws, regulations and institutions supposedly designed for the specific purpose of sheltering the Fijian people from the demands and rigours of modernity. But the system also created another profoundly misleading
impression which many writers have fallen for — that it was a ‘separate’ system of administration. This myth of separateness has produced a further important myth — that the economic ‘backwardness’ of the Fijian race is the result of their economic ‘marginality’.

These myths need to be exposed because the system of native administration was not a ‘separate’ arrangement but in fact a central part of the whole machinery of colonial rule. Similarly, Fijians were not ‘marginalized’ from the economic ‘mainstream’ but were very much part of it. Where they differed from the other races was in the nature of their integration. In most instances and at different historical stages, their predominant forms of economic involvement were different from those of the other races. The forms of exploitation of Fijian labour, therefore, were often different from those of Indian labour. Behind the myths of Fijian protection and economic marginality, then, lie a reality of colonial exploitation the nature of which we now examine.

Native administration: neither separate nor protective

We have already noted the regional variations in social structure which existed in precapitalist Fiji. For Gordon, those differences presented a major problem. How was he to establish a system of native administration based on traditional social arrangements if those arrangements varied so much? To resolve that difficulty, he set about constructing his own model of the ‘traditional’ social structure which he then used as the basis of the system of native administration. As France (1969:110) put it:

It was...necessary to introduce uniformity into the system of administration, and the indigenous ‘institutions of government’, such as they were, would have been too varied and despotic to have been incorporated into a colonial administration. The Fijian administration soon established itself as the new mode of social control which supplemented and, in some respects, incorporated, that of the chiefs.

With the enactment of the 1876 Native Affairs Regulations Ordinance, then, the system of native administration came into being. Covering virtually every aspect of Fijian life, it provided for a tiered structure of administrative units. At the bottom level were the villages (koro), each headed by a village headman (turaga ni koro). Contiguous villages were grouped into districts (tikina), each headed by a buli to whom all the turaga ni koro of the district were responsible. Districts were grouped in turn into provinces (yasana) whose boundaries often corresponded with traditional ones. With the exception of those of inland Viti Levu under European commissioners, the provinces were
headed by *Roko Tuis*, each of whom was directly responsible to the governor.

In addition to these administrative units and personnel, there were district and provincial councils and the Council of Chiefs. District councils (*Bose ni Tikina*) were concerned strictly with matters of local welfare and good order while the jurisdiction of the provincial councils (*Bose ni Yasana*) was much wider. The *bulis* collectively presided over the former and, similarly, the *Roko Tuis* collectively presided over the latter. The Council of Chiefs (*Bose Vakaturaga*) was composed primarily of chiefs drawn from all the provinces.

It is important to note that the Council of Chiefs was created by Arthur Gordon. It was subordinate to the governor and its role was purely advisory. However, largely through chiefly efforts it soon came to be regarded as the very embodiment of the Fijian body politic and was always consulted by the colonial state on matters affecting Fijian interests. That, of course, greatly facilitated the exercise of colonial rule but the Council of Chiefs, like other councils, was an alien institution. As France (*ibid.*:108-109) put it:

> Although it had been a Fijian habit to discuss matters in council at a village level, or even at the level of a local group of villages in time of war, there is no evidence that the councils set up by Gordon were ‘purely native and of spontaneous growth’. Assemblies of people had traditionally gathered for the interchange of gifts but social intercourse was limited on these occasions. The high chiefs rarely met in council until the imported institutions of government required them to do so.

And of the system of native administration generally:

> Whatever outward semblance of a traditional or indigenous system Gordon’s native administration possessed for European observers, Fijians clearly regarded it as an imported institution directly under the control of the Governor (*ibid.*:108).

Despite its alien character, the system of native administration worked wonderfully as a mechanism of social control. With chiefs now co-opted into the state machinery as junior functionaries, their traditional authority was complemented with administrative authority. As agents of social control, they formed crucial links in a chain of containment which controlled the Fijian masses and allowed the relatively smooth functioning of a colonial economy dominated by white capital. The idea, therefore, that it was a separate arrangement which protected the Fijian masses is nothing more than a
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misconception. Yet from that myth it was a short jump to another one — that the cause of Fijian economic backwardness was their 'economic marginality'.

Fijian labour: overt and hidden forms of exploitation

Those who advance the dual economy thesis of Fiji argue that, largely as a result of the system of native administration, Fijians were confined to a 'subsistence sector' where they languished under unprogressive traditional practices and were unable therefore to participate adequately in the 'modern', 'monetary', or 'commercial sector' (see, for example, Fisk 1970; Belshaw 1964; Watters 1969; Desai 1978). Fijians, in other words, were marginalized from the economic mainstream and for that they paid the price of being overrun by their more competitive European and, later, Indian counterparts.

This too is a myth. Fijians were not marginalized from the 'mainstream' of the capitalist-dominated colonial economy. What writers have mistaken for Fijian economic marginality was precisely the concentration of Fijians in particular forms of economic involvement which not only held out little hope of economic success but also lacked even the appearance of direct and extensive participation in capitalist relations. Europeans and Indo-Fijians were not only and extensively engaged in capitalist activities, they were also seen to be involved. For the vast majority of Fijians, however, that was not the case. Hence it is relatively easy to understand why so many writers advanced the mistaken empiricist argument that Fijians were economically marginalized. Add to that the heavy concentration of Fijians in villages, the slow pace of village life, the appearance of Fijian physical wellbeing, and the smiling Fijian faces, and the argument about the protection of the Fijians appears to be vindicated. Capitalist exploitation of Fijian labour is thus obscured, although exploited it certainly was.

Until the indenture period, the burden of capitalist production fell on Fijian commoners: first the harvesting and processing of sandalwood and bêche-de-mer, then cotton production, and finally, with cotton's collapse, the expansion of copra production which for the first eight years of British rule accounted for the largest proportion of export earnings (Wilkins 1953:85).

During the colonial period the exploitation of Fijian labour power was effected through wage work and the appropriation of peasant produce. Increasingly, however, Fijians became reluctant to take fulltime wage employment, preferring instead the less demanding and

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1 For versions of this idea see Burns, Watson and Peacock (1960); Mamak (1978); Norton (1977); Ali (1980); Premdas (1980:30-44).
less regimented pace of subsistence work. The pressure which this placed on the labour supply was worsened by the devastating effect which the measles epidemic of 1875 had on the Fijian population. In the early months of that year alone, about 40,000 Fijians died (Legge 1958:214).

The pressure to find ways of drawing Fijians into wage work remained until the colonial state introduced a system of communal taxation under which villages were required to pay their taxes in kind — in agricultural produce. That arrangement was preferred over the system of poll taxes introduced by the Cakobau government in 1871. Gordon realized only too well that poll taxes would not yield much revenue when aimed at a ‘population nine-tenths of which possess[ed] no money’ (quoted in Samy 1977:45). Fijian labour could now be exploited through the direct appropriation of surplus peasant production. The system was, of course, successful. And it was not overtly coercive. It brought in much-needed export earnings and it added to the colonial state’s coffers. Between 1875 and 1879, for example, communal taxes accounted for an average 30 per cent of total state revenue (Wilkins 1953:85). This hidden form of exploitation, however, was only one of several.

For their subsistence, the vast majority of Fijian wage labourers relied in part on the unpaid labour of relatives and friends in their villages. To that extent, the cost of labour power was effectively subsidized. With free supplies of food and other necessities from the village, the price of Fijian labour fell and it was possible for capital to pay Fijian workers less than the full value of their labour power. What is more, for a very long time (until the late 1940s in fact) there was little in the way of organized pressure from Fijian workers for higher wages. Fijian wages, therefore, could be, and were, kept low.

Fijians were also exploited indirectly in exchange relations. Often, the prices which Fijians paid for their purchases were high, and for the Fijian masses in particular the burden was especially heavy. But Fijians sold commodities to capitalist enterprises and often at low prices, which meant higher capitalist profits. In addition, capitalists benefitted indirectly when Fijian produce was sold cheaply in local markets.

The earliest set of statistics on Fijian income cover the period 1950 to 1953 (O’Loughlin 1956). They show that 75 per cent of total Fijian income was derived from agriculture and that only 25 per cent of agricultural income was cash earnings. It has also been estimated that cash earnings from domestic sales of subsistence items like root crops, vegetables, fruit and fish accounted for a mere 4 per cent of total Fijian income. The low prices which this suggests constitute another hidden form of exploitation of the Fijian peasantry — the availability of cheap subsistence goods served to reduce the cost of labour power. The surpluses of Fijian peasant production, in other words, subsidized: the
cost of reproducing labour power and thereby allowed capital to keep wages down.

This predicament of the Fijian masses was exacerbated by the policies of the colonial state which claimed to have their welfare at heart. Because Fijians were heavily concentrated in agriculture, their economic condition might have been greatly assisted had the colonial state paid special attention to the development of that sector. But the evidence suggests otherwise. Between 1938 and 1953, for example, the proportion of state resources devoted to agriculture averaged a mere 4 per cent. Three times as much was spent on the state's repressive apparatuses (defence and law and order). See Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Composition of State Expenditure for Selected Years 1938-53 (%)

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<th>1950</th>
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<tr>
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<td>100</td>
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Source: O'Loughlin (1956:49).

In regard to wage work, the plight of Fijian workers in the goldmining industry brings into sharp focus the harsh realities of
capitalist exploitation of Fijian labour and further exposes the myth that British rule served to protect the Fijians.\(^2\)

Centred around Vatukoula in northern Viti Levu, the industry emerged in the 1930s and its early rapid expansion was due largely to the sharp rise in the gold price which came in the wake of world depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Not surprisingly, therefore, its importance to the colonial economy was quickly established. Within the space of six years, between 1932 and 1938, gold replaced copra as the colony’s second largest foreign exchange earner after sugar. The industry retained its prominent status after the war, averaging 17.5 per cent of total exports between 1946 and 1950.

By the 1950s production costs began to escalate because of the shifting balance between open-cut and underground mining, a more complicated milling process and the closure of two mines. With the viability of the industry coming under increasing stress, more and more state financial assistance was made available. More importantly, tight control of labour and labour costs became imperative (Bain 1986:39).

Racial stratification was the basis of labour division, job classification, occupational mobility, wages and other returns. White expatriate Europeans were the bosses, local part-Europeans and Rotumans dominated the skilled and middle-level positions, while Fijians made up the vast bulk of the unskilled workforce. Fijian wages were abysmally low. ‘Between 1935 and 1948 [they] scarcely rose and real earnings in fact declined as inflation soared during and after the war’ (ibid.:40) In addition to their poor wages, Fijian workers laboured under a harsh work routine and inferior conditions, lived in congested accommodation and had to bear the ignimony of a system of racial segregation and discrimination which governed relations both inside and outside the workplace.

This brief survey of the overt and hidden forms of exploitation of Fijian labour during the colonial period should put to rest the myths of Fijian protection and economic marginality, at least as far as the Fijian masses were concerned. For beneath the outward appearance of an easy-going, village lifestyle lies a history of racist and capitalist exploitation of Fijian labour. Unfortunately, the machinations of the ruling class, which will be discussed in later chapters, were such that the reality of that exploitation was obscured. The ideology and practice of racialism perpetrated by the ruling class made a large section of the Fijian masses see themselves primarily as Fijians rather than as exploited people who shared with their Indian counterparts similar class

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\(^2\) The seminal work on labour relations in Fiji’s goldmining industry is Bain (1987). The account which follows, however, is drawn from a shorter piece, Bain (1986).
interests. It is to the exploitation of that latter group during the colonial era that we now turn.

Gordon had faith in Fiji’s productive potential but there were problems tapping it. Fijian labour was problematic and there was a shortage of capital. Also, Gordon was not overly impressed with Fiji’s white settlers: ‘a new set of men’ would have to come in before there would be ‘any real prosperity in the colony’ (quoted in Moynagh 1981:16). He therefore turned to New Zealand and Australia, and in the early 1880s there was a considerable infusion of capital from those countries.

This change brought about the consolidation of the sugar foundation of the colonial economy and a history of even greater foreign control, superexploitation and more brutal forms of racism. Class conflict was about to intensify and a new racial mask was assumed, the worst victims of which would be the Indian working masses. The roots of that tragic experience lie in the entry and the awesome power of King Sugar — the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR).

**Indian labour: indenture and beyond**

Without a cheap and adequate supply of labour, a viable sugar economy would not have been possible and we have already seen why Fijians were not a reliable source. Labour therefore had to be found elsewhere and, drawing on his experience in Trinidad and Mauritius, Gordon embarked on a massive importation of indentured workers from India which was to last from 1879 until 1916. A total of 60,965 workers was brought in and their presence introduced a racial dimension which to this day continues to shape the political economy of Fiji in a most fundamental way.

With indenture, Fijians were increasingly displaced by Indians as the major racial group at the exploited end of the capital-labour axis. Hence, once wage labour became overwhelmingly Indian, the major class contradiction — that between capital and labour — took on a new racial form.

In addition to cheap labour, sugar capital also needed land. But inscribed in the Deed of Cession was the principle of the inalienability of native land and initially Gordon was anxious to respect it, or at least be seen to respect it. When resident white settlers had pressed him to ratify 1,683 claims for a total of 854,000 acres of land alienated before Cession, he approved only 517. Now with the compelling need to attract new capital in order to increase production, he became determined that his land policy should not prevent the inflow of new capital, and that sufficient freehold land for plantation
agriculture should be left in the colony so that the short terms of native leases would not deter investors (ibid.:19).

For Gordon, principles were fine as long as they did not stand in the way of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ — and the inalienability of native land was no exception. Among the early violations of that principle was the sale of 500 acres to Stanlake Lee & Company and 1,000 acres to the CSR (ibid.). In the years to come more and more land was made available to sugar capital, most especially to the CSR, and invariably the hand of the colonial state lurked somewhere in the background.

But state pampering to the wishes of sugar capital did not always go unchallenged. Fijian landowners often resisted, sometimes successfully. In October 1905, for example, the CSR, with the assistance of the colonial state and one of its Fijian chiefly functionaries, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, tried unsuccessfully to alienate 7,000 acres at the back of Nausori. However, such setbacks were more the exception than the rule.

From its Australian experience, the CSR knew that the most profitable area of sugar production was milling and it was precisely in that area that its expertise was greatest. Hence it was concerned to concentrate its efforts in milling and hoped that local white planters already living in the vicinity of its mills would be able to provide an adequate supply of cane, at least initially. Unfortunately for the CSR they were unable to do so and consequently CSR was forced to develop its own plantations on a much larger scale than originally intended. That, however, did not prevent it from making an early start on shifting the burden of heavy production costs on to others.

As early as 1890, the CSR began leasing parts of its estates to some of its former plantation managers and to local Europeans who in turn employed Indian labour. In addition, there were farmers who owned or leased freehold land but subcontracted the sugargrowing work to others. Effectively absentee landlords, they came to be known as contractors. By the early 1900s these non-company plantations ranged in size from 600 to 1,000 acres. By 1914 the plantation system was well-developed and for the CSR it was a highly attractive system. It ensured an adequate supply of cane and the company not only determined the price of cane but also enjoyed considerable control over cultivation methods, tenancy agreements, rent charges and credit facilities.

The European planters, of course, became increasingly agitated at the power of the CSR but, being much the weaker fraction of sugar capital, there was little they could do about it. Their weakness was clearly demonstrated by their inability to withstand the first major crisis in the industry — the end of indenture in 1916. 
As knowledge of the brutality of plantation life spread, international pressure against the indenture system intensified and in 1916 the last shipload of workers left India for Fiji. Local planters were more dependent than the CSR on indentured labour and agitated for its retention without success. For its part, the Company responded to the potentially serious labour shortage by simply accelerating a process of restructuring started back in the mid-1890s. The smallfarm system dominated by Indian tenant farmers was about to replace the large plantation as the backbone of the industry.

From 1894 the CSR began leasing land to Indians who had completed their indenture. By the standards of the time the lots that were leased were comparatively small — between 100 and 200 acres. Thirty years later, however, the average farm size fell to between 8 and 12 acres. Those with farms of over 100 acres became large cane farmers and it was they, together with those who took over from Europeans as contractors, who formed the embryo of the Indian kulak class, i.e., the large and rich Indian cane farmers.

There was also an increasing number of Indian cane farmers who leased native land. That, of course, introduced a potential source of friction between the two races. But it was the presence of a rich Indian kulak class which most increased the likelihood of more Fijian resentment of Indians. Among the local white plantation owners, on the other hand, racialist feelings were already very strong because Indian farmers were seen as direct competitors who threatened to do them out of business. As Gillion put it:

This rise of the Indian cane farmer was a pointer to the future of Fiji.... To the planters, the unindentured Indian was a potential competitor, who picked the eyes out of the land available for leasing and, with his frugality and industry, was a threat to cane prices.

It is not surprising, therefore, that

....as early as 1903 there was unrest among planters who believed that the CSR Company intended to replace the European planter with a small Indian farmer who could accept a lower price for cane, and some wanted a law passed to forbid Indians to produce except as paid labour (Gillion 1962:100).

It was not to be. The CSR pressed on with the settlement of Indians as tenant farmers, recognizing, as the general manager put it, that 'the only means by which the position could be rendered really secure would be to make the industry independent of immigration by permanently attaching to it the people introduced for plantation work' (ibid.:186).
Exploitation in the colonial economy

The company experimented with several settlement schemes as it searched for the optimum farm size and in 1925 decided on a range of between eight and twelve acres. By the early 1930s, settlement on that basis was completed and the smallfarm system became firmly established as the foundation of the sugar industry (see Table 2.2). However, the change in structure did not lessen the exploitation of producers.

Table 2.2: Cane Acreage by Farm Type 1925—1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total (Acres)</th>
<th>Company (%)</th>
<th>European (%)</th>
<th>Tenant (%)</th>
<th>Contractors (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>64,396</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>78,250</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>87,738</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>91,624</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>89,059</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Shepard (1945:38).

During the indenture period, CSR profits hinged on the long working hours — 50 hours per week — and the task system, whereby set pieces of work had to be completed within specified periods of time. When the industry was hit by an economic crisis in the mid-1880s, enforcement of indenture contracts also became much more rigorous.

A labour shortage in India meant a labour shortage for the CSR. To make matters worse the sugar price on the London market fell by 38 per cent between 1883 and 1884. Neither the company nor the colonial state could do anything about either development and when the company complained about its high costs and threatened to withdraw from Fiji if they could not be contained, the state responded sympathetically. As Gillion put it (ibid.:79), the colonial state was ‘reluctant to put difficulties in [the Company’s] way’. The state’s class bias was clearly shown. The workers did not matter. Their wages remained abysmally low.

The wage rates in 1887 were 7s.6d for males and 4s.4d for females; it took 32 years for them to double (Narsey 1979:85). That company workers were exploited much more intensely than their white counterparts in Australia is suggested by the wage differential of one to seven (ibid.:88). But within Fiji similar differences along racial lines also existed. Black workers were paid far less than their white bosses.
Beyond the Politics of Race

The wage differentials of 1921 are shown in Table 2.3. Racism was absolutely central to capitalist profit.

Table 2.3 Yearly Pay for Black and White CSR Employees, 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White</th>
<th>Artisans</th>
<th>£156 - £185</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>£144 - £300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overseers</td>
<td>£200 - £250 (plus house - £500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>£300 - £400 (plus house - £500)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black labour, whether of Indians or Fijians, including food £40

Source: Chapple (1921:161-163).

With such low wages, a decent standard of living for the workers was impossible. Ahmed Ali has estimated that in 1921 the annual income for a family of four was a deficit of £11.11s.4d. He concluded that

a cane labourer with a wife and two children at the best could eke out an existence and at the worst live under deprivation. This of course assumes that each man had only two children, and ignores the tendency of Indians to have large families; those with more than the average accepted here would have had considerable difficulty (Ali 1980:91).

The appalling conditions of work and of plantation life generally exacted a terrible toll on the workers. Suicides were common and the Indian mortality rate frightfully high. Between 1902 and 1912, for example, there were 926 suicides, and between 1909 and 1914 an average of 8 per cent of all adult immigrants from India died within five years of arrival in the country — and of those 70 per cent were aged between 20 and 30 years (Narsey 1979:88).

Because of a harsh work pace, physical brutality, sickness, low morale and a general air of misery, it was inevitable that the level of work performance should fall below that which the CSR preferred. Of course, the company had its own methods of dealing with ‘substandard’ performance but the state did not just sit by idly either. Placed at the service of the exploiter was the state’s legal machinery, the centrepiece of which was the insidious and highly repressive Master and Servants Ordinance of 1888.
The overall criminal conviction rate for Indians was very high, fluctuating between 59 per cent and 81 per cent from 1889 until 1910, but conviction rates for labour offences were even higher, ranging from 73 per cent to 92 per cent over the same period (ibid.:90). Also, the major types of labour offence are revealing: unlawful absence, failure to complete tasks, refusal to work, and want of ordinary diligence. Clearly the legal apparatuses of the state were very useful for the defence of private profit.

In the small farm sector, the exploitation of Indo-Fijian labour took two forms. The first was company control over cane prices. We have already noted that by the mid 1920s the white planters were being quickly squeezed out of the industry largely because the cane prices paid by the CSR were insufficient to maintain expected white living standards. But low cane prices were also paid to the Indian farmers. Betraying yet again its deep-rooted racism, the Company’s attitude was that if ‘white planters could not be forced to accept, or could not be expected to accept, low prices for cane...Indian farmers would’ (ibid.:105). What is more, precisely the same attitude was taken by the colonial state, as the following official statement shows:

the price offered by the company (CSR) though not sufficient to enable European planters to produce sugar cane at a profit is sufficiently high to enable Indian farmers to extract a good livelihood from the cultivation of cane and the company has thus been able to maintain its normal level of output of manufactured sugar (quoted in ibid.:106).

A second form of exploitation had to do with the various types of control that the Company was able to exert over sugar production: regulation of cultivation practices, surveillance by company overseers, legally binding agreements with stipulations on the tending and harvesting of cane and the varieties of cane to be grown, control over the use of fertilisers and other means of production through the use of hiring arrangements, control over tenancy agreements, and finally control of credit (see Moynagh 1981; Narsey 1979). Of these, the last two were particularly important.

Tenancies could always be terminated by either party giving one year’s notice, but the CSR inserted into its tenancy agreements a clause which allowed Company termination of the contract without notice ‘in the event of legislation being passed limiting its freedom of action in the manner of buying crops...or otherwise affecting the conditions under which it carries on its operations’ (quoted in Narsey 1979:109). This, of course, considerably strengthened the company’s position vis-a-vis the farmer. At a more general level it underlined the power of the CSR because the clause effectively signalled to the colonial state a determination to defend company interests against offending legislation.
With regard to the provision of credit, the CSR understood well its importance as a method of control. With limited funds to finance their consumption and production expenses, farmers found it extremely difficult to escape this instrument of control, and all the more so because Company interest rates were far lower than the exorbitant rates charged by predatory Indian storekeepers and moneylenders (Moynagh 1981:129).

With these forms of exploitation and control, then, it is not surprising that the CSR was able to reap immense profits. As Bruce Knapman said of the early years:

Between 1883 and 1913, when sugar colonies in the West Indies went into decline because of a 57% drop in the world sugar price, Fiji's sugar export revenue increased nearly sixfold (Knapman 1988:158. Also see Knapman 1987).

Narsey has estimated that between 1914 and 1923 the company made 'superprofits' of about 13 million pounds (1979:98). Compared with a mere 3.7 million pounds profit for its Australian operations during the same period, the results of the Fiji operation clearly show just how important Fiji was for the CSR. Little wonder, therefore, that the company's historians were able to make this observation: 'In Fiji during the 1914-1924 period, CSR enjoyed the most spectacular monetary success in its history' (quoted in ibid.). But the burden of that success was primarily borne by the Indian masses. Low wages and cane prices locked them into lives of hardship and misery. They received little help from the colonial state. The farmers, for example, mounted major strikes in 1921, 1943 and 1960 in support of demands for better returns, but each time they failed. Each time the CSR refused to raise the price of cane, the colonial state sided with it.

In those and other struggles, the Indian masses suffered much the same kind of fate which befell their Fijian peasant counterparts earlier on. A common feature of their suppression was the way in which they were compromised by the bourgeois character of their own political leaders. We turn therefore to the early struggles and the containment of the peasants and workers.
Chapter 3

Struggle and Containment

Since all but one of the high chiefs who signed the Deed of Cession were from the eastern part of Fiji, it is not surprising that the roots of the Fijian anticolonial struggles are to be found in the western regions.

Fijian peasant struggles

The hill tribes of the interior were renowned for their fierce independence. When local white capital, using Cakobau as a figurehead, sought to create a central authority in 1871, they resisted. But the armed forces of the Cakobau government were able to subdue them only to a degree, and their spirit of independence resurfaced in 1876 when they resisted colonial rule. On that occasion, however, after a costly military campaign, they were finally subjugated. 1

Of all the early instances of rebellion against colonial rule, this was the bloodiest and most brutal. The hill tribes of Viti Levu clearly threatened the viability of the colonial administration, and ‘severity in dealing with the leaders of the rebellion was considered essential for long-term peace’ (Legge 1958:215). Very importantly the colonial state made a deliberate effort to prevent its campaign appearing as ‘a punitive campaign against natives by a “white” Government’. Apart from its general direction, therefore, the details of strategy and the execution of the assault ‘were left largely to natives’ (ibid.:215-216). Fijians were pitted against Fijians, the hill tribes were conquered and the colonial state won the ‘Little War in Fiji’. Legge’s summary of the whole affair is telling:

[Gordon’s] desire for native assistance in the war was to secure their support for the new Government’s system of law and order, and at the same time to prevent the growth of a continuing hostility on the part of the defeated tribes. So

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1 For discussions of this campaign, see Legge (1958:part 2); Burns (1963); Samy (1977); Norton (1972).
successful was he from that point of view that it was possible at the close of hostilities to leave a small force of merely 150 native constables in the district (ibid.:216).

With the suppression of the hill tribes, the execution of their leaders, and the pacification of the district, Fijian resistance to colonial rule subsided. The violence of this episode in Fiji's history issued a warning to potential agitators that they would incur the wrath and repressive might of the colonial state. The warning was apparently effective for when indigenous resistance to colonial rule surfaced again the level of physical violence needed to suppress it was far less than that meted out to the brave of the interior.

The next instances of anticolonial struggle were the *Luve ni wai* and the *Tuka* movements. The few writings on these movements have emphasized their cultic or millenarian aspects but it is quite clear that at root they were reactions against colonial authority, for behind all the ritual and religious paraphernalia lay an anti-colonial struggle.

A youth movement, the *Luve ni wai* (Children of the Water) originated in the Colo area in inland Viti Levu. In one district, members resolved to emancipate themselves from British rule and adopted an authority structure that mimicked the colonial one. But apart from this particular form of open challenge, it was the unmistakeable anti-authority precepts of the wider movement that caused the colonial state concern. Many members were incarcerated for insubordination and a special Ordinance No.3 of 1887 was invoked to cope with disturbances emanating not just from the *Luve ni wai* but also from a larger and potentially more threatening movement — the *Tuka*.

Existing during the same period as the *Luve ni wai*, the *Tuka* movement originated in Ra but soon spread throughout the west. It was formed in 1885 by a Ra commoner and self-styled prophet, Dugumoi, who later took the name Navosavakudua. The name *Tuka* means ‘immortality’ or ‘the promise of immortality’. With its inspiration drawn from Fijian legend, it is not surprising that many have seen it primarily as a revivalist religious movement. But even the recognized authority on the *Tuka*, the Rev. W. Sutherland, said in 1910 that the movement, ‘apparently harmless and simple at first ...was of a distinctly political nature and hostile to the Government’.

The advent of the missionaries, followed by settled Government, took away all that the native had to live and struggle and fight for in earlier times... It was inevitable

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2 For discussions of the *Tuka* and the *Luve ni wai* see Sutherland (1908-1910:51-57); Clammer (1976: chapter 6); Norton (1972: chapter 5); Worsley (1970: chapter 1).
therefore... that spasmodic efforts should be made to revive old customs and possibly regain power (1908-1910:56).

The order of the world, Navosavakudua prophesied, would soon be overturned so that the whites would serve the natives and the chiefs would serve the commoners. To prepare for the millennium when commoners would reign supreme, he set up a quasi-military organization consisting of soldiers, sergeants, scribes, *rokos* and *bulis*, the last two being the names of positions in the colonial native administration. At the senior level of the hierarchy were officials known as 'destroying angels'.

No doubt the biblical overtone reinforced the movement's religious character, but the adoption of official titles used in the colonial administration, together with the overtly military nature of the organization and the hint of a power struggle, all point very clearly to the anti-colonial and anti-chief nature of the movement. Here, then, was a movement of Fijian peasants rebelling against those whom they saw as their oppressors — the white functionaries of the colonial state and their subordinate chiefly agents. The latter were doubly oppressive because they not only continued to exact material tribute from their traditional subjects but they had also joined forces with the white rulers.

Once the date of the millennium was fixed and preparations got underway in earnest for the overthrow of the white men and their collaborators, the movement was stopped by the colonial state — again with chiefly assistance, in this case a chief from Bau (*ibid.)*; also see Clammer 1976:113; Norton 1972:227). Navosavakadua's lieutenants were imprisoned while he was sentenced to hard labour and later banished to the island of Rotuma three hundred miles away. He died in exile but enthusiasm for the movement continued. A resurgence of activity occurred in 1892 but was successfully suppressed. Navosavakadua's village was burned, the members of his tribe banished to the island of Kadavu for ten years, and a force of armed constabulary stationed at Nadarivatu, 'sufficiently strong to impress the inhabitants that the forces of the gods of the Nakauvadra were less powerful than the authority of the King' (Sutherland 1908-1910:56). The movement soon declined and by the end of World War I it had died.

However, the *Tuka* was followed by a larger movement, the *Viti Kabani*. The activities of its leader, Apolosi Ranawai, himself a *Tuka* disciple, opened another chapter in the history of indigenous peasant struggle against colonial rule. Of all the early instances of indigenous struggle, this was the most important in the sense that it was the first clear expression of organized struggle by the Fijian peasantry against not only colonial rule but also the underlying system of exploitation which it served — capitalism.
An adequate understanding of Apolosi's movement is only possible against the background of major changes brought about by Governor Everard im Thurn. Unlike his predecessors who suppressed the *Luve ni wai* and the *Tuka* movements, im Thurn actually facilitated the emergence of the *Viti Kabani*.

For im Thurn, Gordon's native policies were no longer appropriate. He believed it was time for Fijians to join the modern world and learn to stand on their own feet. Of all the early governors, im Thurn stands out as the only one to have departed significantly from the pattern of colonial administration that had been set by Gordon. The maverick governor sought to proletarianize the Fijians and in so doing heightened the possibility of further indigenous reaction against colonial rule.3

The situation in Fiji at the time of im Thurn's arrival appeared different to him from that which existed in the early years of Gordonian rule. With the Fijian population in rapid decline, the threat of its extinction loomed large. Moreover, Gordon's *protective* and paternalistic administration seemed to im Thurn to have done little to prepare Fijians for the rigours of modern society. Above all else, it discouraged the development of 'individualism' — not individualism in Fijians generally but rather in commoners. The commoners, he felt, had to be rescued from chiefly oppression. As he said:

...the term 'Fijian' includes two distinct classes, whose interests are to a greater or lesser extent opposed, viz: the chiefs and the commoners — what is the gain to one is often the loss to the other. To me their interests seem to be as distinct as those of patrician and plebeian, or of noble and serf... if [commoners] try to accumulate property, it is taken from them (quoted in Chapelle 1970:53).

In chiefly *lala* im Thurn recognized the source of commoner oppression by chiefs. But commoners, he said, were burdened by a 'double series of demands'. The first was the chief's personal *lala* (tribute exacted by virtue of traditional chiefly privilege) and official *lala* (tribute exacted by virtue of his status as a state official). Official *lala*, he argued, should be retained because it was payment for services rendered by state functionaries. But there was no longer justification for personal *lala*. The practice should cease:

I do not overlook the fact that the chiefs were probably the heads of the commune and therefore, as being then responsible

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3 For discussions of im Thurn's policies, see Chapelle (1970); MacNaught (1982: chapter 3); France (1969: chapter 9); and Legge (1958).
for the administration of the affairs of the commune, entitled to payment or lala. But the British Government in instituting its ‘Native System’ substituted this for the system of rule by the chiefs, so that the administrative function of these ‘chiefs’ is, or ought to be, gone, and with it the chiefs’ right to lala is, or ought to be, cancelled (ibid.:56).

The major effect of this position was that chiefs who were not employed by the colonial state would effectively lose all lala. The intended effect of his attack on personal lala ‘would be the creation in the ordinary Fijian of that individuality which would...be the only thing to save him and his race from extinction’ (ibid.). For im Thurn the time had arrived for the Fijians to be drawn out of their sheltered existence and prepared for modern life. Reward and gain would henceforth be the result of individual effort and not birthright. In other words, traditional chiefly privilege would have no place in the new order. Chiefs and commoners had to become equals and if differences emerged between them it would be the legitimate result of hard work and individual merit.

Im Thurn was not concerned with hard work as such but with hard work of a particular kind — hard wage work. He sympathized with commoners because in the traditional, precapitalist system they laboured hard but had little to show for their efforts; under the ‘modern’ (i.e., capitalist) system, he intimated, they would. It was of course highly unlikely that Fijians would succeed as capitalists, so the real thrust of the governor’s plan was to turn Fijians into wage workers, to proletarianize the Fijian people.

Steps were therefore taken to repeal offending legislation, especially Ordinance No.3 of 1877, so that refusal to pay personal lala would no longer be an offence. Enactment of new legislation was delayed, however, because of the lengthy time involved in re-drafting regulations. But rather than sit idly by, im Thurn pressed ahead with his campaign by confronting the chiefs directly. In his opening address to the Great Council of Chiefs on 10 October 1905, he prefaced his remarks with statements about patriotism and then proceeded to castigate the chiefs:

I know also that some of you think only, or chiefly, of yourselves, of your lala, and your sevu, your [kerekere] and your other exactions from your people. These of you are unpatriotic, and it is these of you who are killing your people (ibid.:57).

Having introduced ideas of patriotism and selflessness, the governor turned to his main theme, individualism.

The response of both chiefs and commoners to his intervention was sufficiently positive that he later sketched the outlines of a wholly new
Beyond the Politics of Race

approach to native affairs based on freedom of choice and action. Im Thurn announced his intention to make legislative changes that would allow greater freedom of movement for Fijians who wished to take up paid employment (ibid.:57). But it was on the matter of land that his initiative had the greatest impact.

The governor believed that Fijian advancement could never be secured so long as Fijians were hamstrung by a system of land tenure that was not based on individual ownership. Accordingly he enacted four ordinances to correct the situation. However, as it turned out the main beneficiaries were not Fijians but white capital. Between 1905 and 1909 'some 20,000 acres of Fijian land was sold to white settlers, in addition to a larger area leased' (Burns 1963:138). The principle of the inalienability of native land was given yet another major jolt.

From distant London, a shocked Arthur Gordon, now Lord Stanmore, launched a stinging attack on im Thurn's major detour. The Fijian retention of land was central to the appearance of benevolence that surrounded British rule and in particular the system of native administration. That appearance was now threatened by im Thurn, and in the end Gordon won the day. In 1909 the ordinance which permitted the sale of Fijian land was repealed and the system of native administration effectively swung back to its former Gordonian path.

Though the attempt to proletarianize the Fijian peasantry failed, im Thurn's experiment had important consequences. His attack on the chiefly class and his apparent sympathy for the commoners increased the possibility of further open struggle by the Fijian labouring classes.

Apolosi Ranawai, whose association with the Tuka movement had strengthened his opposition to colonial rule, was undoubtedly encouraged by what im Thurn had said and apparently sought to do. But Apolosi was not a peasant, he was a worker. So it is not altogether surprising that when he organized the Viti Kabani movement, his aim was to free his predominantly peasant followers from not only colonial rule but also capitalist exploitation.

With the collaboration of some European businessmen in Suva, Apolosi Ranawai, a thirty-six year old carpenter, formed the Viti Kabani (Fiji Company) in 1913. Like its predecessors, Apolosi's movement had a religious character. However, its basic goal was a New Era 'when the burdens of taxation, enforced communal labour, and dominance by chiefs and whites would be eliminated'.

A major vehicle for the liberation of oppressed Fijians was to be the exclusively Fijian Viti Kabani. Its basic purpose was to buy and sell Fijian agricultural produce so that control of Fijian economic activity

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4 For discussions of Apolosi and the Viti Kabani, see MacNaught (1978, 1982: chapter 3); Chapelle (1975); Couper (1968).
would remain in the hands of the producers. As a memorandum from
the company stated:

The cause [or the beginning] of this thing is through the
Europeans here in Fiji swindling us, the price of all our things
are different... Their swindling us will never cease (quoted in
Couper 1968:269).

By 1914 the movement had spread west to the Yasawa Islands and
in the opposite direction to eastern Viti Levu and beyond to Lau and
Vanua Levu. In Rewa the movement was particularly strong; at a
meeting in Draubuta village in January 1915 between 3,000 and 4,000
people attended. Resolutions were passed which give an idea of the
movement's ambitions. Fijians were to enter into contracts with the
company 'with the idea of keeping our lands in our own hands and all
the produce therefrom'. Company stores would be built in every
locality and would have no dealings with Europeans. Further, there
would be a native shipbuilding yard in each province and the company
would have its own police and church (ibid.:270).

Although there is general agreement that the movement was not a
commercial success, it did pose a serious threat to the established order.
Europeans (and the few Chinese) who acted as middlemen in the
marketing of Fijian agricultural produce were threatened with a
substantial drop in business. Also, the authority of the colonial state
was undermined as Apolosi's followers were ordered not to comply
with any of the dictates of the system of native administration. The
movement had its own village officials and it was they, rather than the
rokos and bulis, whom the faithful were urged to obey. Not unnaturally
the chiefly class saw this movement of 'young upstarts' as an affront to
their authority and status. Significantly, that feeling was much greater
in the east than in the west. Although the movement spread to most parts
of Fiji, it was in western Viti Levu that support for it was strongest. It
is also significant that the colonial state recognized a marked tendency
among the people there to develop to an increasing degree along
'individualistic lines' (Norton 1972:231). Im Thum's influence was
showing through.

The regional character of the movement underlines the way in
which colonial capitalism exacerbated uneven development in the
country and it is not surprising that Fijian opposition to the Viti Kabani
was strongest among the eastern chiefly class. That opposition played a
critical part in the suppression of the movement. In that task the central
Fijian figure was Ratu Sukuna, an Oxford-educated high chief who
later became the most senior Fijian state functionary and 'the statesman
of Fiji'. It was he who articulated Fijian opposition to the Viti Kabani
most clearly.
The anti-chief character of the movement was not lost to Sukuna and it is only to be expected that his assessment of Apolosi's followers should reflect his chiefly background and belief that commoners were little more than imbeciles, quite incapable of deciding what was in their best interests; in his own words, 'speaking generally, the more backward the people the more pronounced is the hold of the Viti Company' (Sukuna, letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs, March 1917, in Scarr 1983). In a letter to the Secretary of Native Affairs on 12 March 1917 Sukuna declared that Apolosi's activities confront the Government with facts and tendencies alarming in regard both to native life and Native Administration and create grave responsibilities which must be faced. In character those activities are undoubtedly corrupt and degrading, assuming a political character for the purposes of low gain (ibid.:51).

He charged Apolosi with 'belittling and interfering with constituted authority', 'trafficking with racial feelings for position of gain', and perpetrating 'a crime of the worst kind'. His 'sordid and unpatriotic doings', Sukuna went on, 'deserve the last punishment...[and] the remedy is at hand by striking at the root of the evil, that is, by deporting Apolosi under ordinance III of 1887' (ibid.:57).

Apolosi was duly exiled to Rotuma. The colonial state could hardly have done otherwise, as strong pressure was being exerted not only by the eastern chiefly class but also by capital. When the anti-white theme of Apolosi's propaganda intensified, Europeans rebuked the governor for not taking action against him (Norton 1972:229).

On his return from exile in 1924, Apolosi again took up the cause, and the wider his influence grew the more concerned capital, chiefs and the colonial state became. Further suppression inevitably followed, taking similar forms to those adopted earlier: restriction of native gatherings, imprisonment, and deportation. In 1940 Apolosi returned from a second exile in Rotuma but was sent back again. After consultations between the governor and the east-dominated Council of Chiefs (90 per cent of the council were eastern chiefs), he was subsequently banished to New Zealand 'lest security be endangered in the event of a Japanese invasion' (ibid.:232). With the absence of its leader, the movement went into decline, but even after his death in 1946 veneration of the man continued for a long time.

The Viti Kabani movement holds a very special place in the history of Fiji's working classes. It was a struggle against colonial rule and, more importantly, against capitalist exploitation. Also, it brought into sharp focus the regional cleavage between eastern and western Fiji and demonstrated very clearly the way in which colonial capitalism aggravated regional inequalities.
Struggle and containment

Through Governor im Thurn, the colonial state had sought to draw Fijian labour and land more directly within the ambit of capitalist relations. But the attempt at proletarianization and complete land privatization failed, and with the return to Gordon's native policies the myth of Fijian protection and marginality was salvaged. The setting up of the Fijian administration in 1946 would further strengthen the institutional facade of the myth and make the liberation of the Fijian working classes even more difficult. Their predicament would soon be touted by the Fijian chiefly class as the problem of 'Fijian' economic backwardness rather than the economic backwardness of the Fijian working classes.

But the creation of the Fijian administration was important for another important reason. It marked a turning point in the process of Fijian class formation. Attacks on the system of native administration threatened the official positions of chiefs within the colonial state and to their struggle for survival we now turn.

Chiefs strike back

The co-optation of Fijian chiefs into the colonial state machinery through the system of native administration marked the beginning of (to borrow Mamdani's (1976) term) an indigenous bureaucratic bourgeoisie. To ensure a continuing place for chiefs within the colonial state, however, two conditions had to be met: first, that the cost of running the system of native administration did not strain the state's finances; and second, that the main purpose for which chiefs were hired — to facilitate the task of social control — remained important. By 1913, both had been called into serious question. As a result the system of native administration and the nascent indigenous bureaucratic bourgeoisie came under increasing threat. But the chiefs fought back and for three decades they waged a battle against the colonial state, a battle which grew in intensity until it culminated in victory in 1944 when they assumed control of the newly-formed Fijian administration. The 'main class of collaborators' now turned on the colonial master.

In 1877 a review of the system of native administration had produced some changes but an economic recession in Britain in the 1890s caused the British imperialist state to urge more cost-cutting measures. The call from London provided additional ammunition for those in Fiji who had felt for some time that the system of native administration had 'outlived its usefulness' (Samy 1977:44) and therefore should be dismantled or at the very least pruned back.

Another review was therefore conducted in 1912 and again, despite various changes, the system remained largely intact. In September 1913, however, the secretary of state for the colonies joined the chorus of criticism within Fiji and asked that consideration be given to a
possible reduction or abolition of the system and that responsibilities be
devolved to state officials.

A committee appointed to consider the matter agreed that there
should be more decentralization of authority but recommended that the
Native Department be allowed to continue for a while. Nevertheless the
pressure for abolition was strong, particularly within the local white
community whose leading spokesman Henry Scott had this to say:

The continued separate existence of the Native Office is no
longer necessary nor desirable... [it] has had a fair trial and I
do not think that even the adherents to the system of that
department can suggest its administration has been a success.
To my mind efficiency and control is sadly wanting — more
effective local administration in the provinces is what is required. It would lead to expedition of work instead of as at
present the constant reference to the Native Department in
Suva of minute detail. To perpetuate the present Native
Department and its method of administration would in my
opinion be a grave mistake (quoted in Burns 1963:134,
emphasis added).

The emergent indigenous bureaucratic bourgeoisie saw the writing
on the wall — their interests as a class were coming under increasing
attack. In communicating their concern to the governor, however, they
couched their case not in terms of their threatened class interests but in
terms of a threat to the interests of Fijians as a race. The Roko Tuis of
Talévu, Cakaudrove and Bau — eastern provinces all — wrote:

We Fijians are the most numerous class in the country and
own the greater part of the land... We do not think it at all
reasonable that we should be considered as of no account or
that our department should be belittled... We feel sure that
were the Department to be abolished we should not receive the
same consideration as we now do... We beg that our
Department be maintained (quoted in Khan 1975:27).

To no avail, however. In the same year the process of
decentralization began and the Legislative Council agreed in principle to
abolish the Native Department. Two years later, in 1917, it was
abolished.

Further reviews and reorganizations of the native administration
followed in the 1920s and 1930s and as power shifted more and more
from Fijian to European officials the fledgling Fijian bureaucratic
bourgeoisie became increasingly agitated:

the Fijian leaders were not at all happy.... There was a feeling
of unrest and anxiety... Fijian chiefs, as Rokos, were
[previously] treated as senior officers of the Government....

[N]ow the same Rokos became junior officers of the Government. They were controlled by District Commissioners and District Officers [and the latter] were, invariably, young and inexperienced (ibid.:30).

To press their case, the disgruntled chiefs alleged deterioration of native welfare as a result of neglect by Europeans under whose care Fijians were now being increasingly put (McNaught 1974:5). But the state did not yield. Costs had to be cut and the axe fell on the chiefs.

The attack on the embryonic Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie was facilitated by the fact that the repressive machinery of the colonial state was becoming more firmly established. In relation to social control, therefore, chiefs became rather more dispensable. But their dispensability was certainly not total. Support of the chiefs, especially eastern ones, in the suppression of the Viti Kabani movement demonstrated that very clearly.

But there was another reason for the continuing importance of chiefly support. Fijians were now taking up paid employment in greater numbers and many were settling in the urban areas. Chiefly authority could be useful for controlling urban Fijians. It was clear that the colonial state still needed chiefs — and the chiefs themselves knew it. Accordingly the struggle for the survival of the nascent Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie did not end and victory came finally with the formation of the Fijian administration. A further reorganization in 1948 strengthened the autonomy of the Fijian Administration from central government. A Fijian treasury was introduced to control provincial and district finances and the Fijian Affairs Board, comprising Fijian members of the Legislative Council, was established to control administrative affairs and make regulations (Cole et al. 1985). The Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie had finally ensured its survival and in the years ahead its chiefly members would be joined in increasing numbers by commoners, particularly educated ones.

At the apex of the Fijian administration was the Council of Chiefs but its operating arm was the Fijian Affairs Board. The conservatism of the board ‘reflected its domination by a political elite of chiefs linked as a multiplex group by kin or affinal ties, and by associations in the Council of Chiefs and Legislative Council’ (Norton 1972:223). Fijian members of the Legislative Council served as senior bureaucrats in the Fijian Administration and often also held office in other state apparatuses. As we shall see below, the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie was on the rise. No such success resulted from the struggle of the Indian working classes.
Indian worker struggles

Indenture began in 1879 and worker unrest in the sugar industry began around the mid 1880s. There were strikes on CSR estates at Navuso in February 1886, at Koronivia in the following May and again in February 1888, and also at Labasa in April 1907. In April 1887 130 Indian labourers from Nausori marched to Suva 'to complain of being overworked and underpaid' (Gillion 1962:48-49, 83-89, 155). But it was not until the early 1920s that the first major struggle was mounted.

During the early 1900s the indenture system came under increasing attack as the international community became more and more aware of the inhuman treatment of Indian workers in Fiji. A central figure in the unfolding drama was C.F. Andrews whose untiring efforts served to focus the spotlight on the intransigence of the CSR. But in terms of local leadership, it was Manilal Maganlal Doctor who was most responsible for harnessing the welling resentment of the Indian labouring classes and giving it political direction.

The Indian lawyer from Mauritius arrived in Fiji in 1912 with something of a record of concern for Indian rights. His first five years in Fiji were spent providing legal assistance to Indians and occasionally writing against indenture. But from 1916 onwards he threw himself much more vigorously into the cause, concentrating his activity in the southeastern corner of Viti Levu. He had a leading role in the formation of the Indian Imperial Association of Fiji and he convened numerous meetings during which Indian grievances were discussed and action planned.

At a meeting in Suva in December 1919 a set of demands was drawn up for presentation to the colonial state. It included calls for an end to indenture and for an equal political franchise for everybody, Indians included. By the time Indian labourers in the Suva Public Works Department struck on 15 January in the following year, political awareness among Indians in and around Suva had reached new heights.

The strike had to do with economic issues — low wages, the twelve-hour working day, rising prices and so on. But capital and the state saw it as a political and racial conflict. That they specifically collaborated to suppress it is suggested, for example, by the fact that the state enlisted the legal aid of two of capital's leading spokesmen, Robert Crompton and Henry M. Scott who later became the CSR's legal adviser in Fiji.

The strike heightened political awareness not only among the strikers but throughout the Indian community generally. Indians were simply stunned by the manner in which the strike was put down — prosecution, the use of Fijian and European policemen and reinforcements from Australia and New Zealand, and state manipulation of Indians who betrayed the workers' cause. All this hammered home
to the strikers that the task ahead would be a daunting one. This was further underlined by the treatment meted out to Manilal, the leading ‘political agitator’. Invoking one of the earliest pieces of repressive legislation, the Good Order Ordinance of 1875, the colonial state banished Manilal from Fiji in 1920.

The strike did not spread to the sugar areas. Poor communication facilities meant that cooperation between Suva workers and their counterparts in the canefields was difficult. Consequently, the kind of political consciousness and organization that developed in Suva did not surface in the sugar plantations. Nevertheless, trouble was brewing there.

Retrenchment by the CSR following the 1920 drop in the international sugar price, together with the increasing restiveness of Indian workers at low wages, led to a six-month strike in 1921. Led by Sadhu Bashishth Muni, the strikers presented to the CSR a list of sixteen demands, most of which had to do with work and living conditions. But a call was also made for ‘the release of those innocent strikers [of 1920] who are rotting in Suva Goal’ (Ali 1980:79).

Of course the CSR branded the strike ‘political’. The colonial state’s first response was to appoint a commission to investigate the workers’ grievances but the workers refused to recognize or cooperate with it and it was eventually withdrawn. However, their victory was more apparent than real.

As we have already seen, during this period the CSR was reaping immense profits and at no stage of the dispute did it deny its ability to pay higher wages (ibid.:83). Yet it refused to do so and persisted with the claim that the strike was purely political and racial. By this time the transition to the smallfarm system was well underway and those who were most threatened by that development were the white planters. They were much less able than the CSR to sit out a prolonged strike, and the more prolonged the strike the more likely they could be squeezed out of the industry and so leave more room for Indian smallfarmers. With help from the local press, they pressed the colonial state to end the strike. But it did not, even though it believed that the company was the culprit and quite capable of meeting the strikers’ economic demands. What is more, the state was even impressed with the strikers’ peaceful and orderly conduct (ibid.:82, 95). But the state refused to end the strike because it ‘could not afford to fight the Company which held the economic wellbeing [sic] of Fiji in its hands’ (ibid.:97).

Non-action by the state eventually resulted in the defeat of the strikers. The CSR adopted delaying tactics by shifting the burden of decision-making to its Sydney headquarters. To make matters worse, three ‘reverends’ — Amos, Jarvis and Long — collaborated with the company, secured Fijian scab labour and even dissuaded Fijians from
supporting the Indian strikers. For their efforts, they were amply rewarded by the company. As for the strikers, their ability to maintain pressure weakened considerably. Without resources to sustain the struggle further, and with no prospect of a favourable settlement in sight, dejection followed and in August, six months after it began, the strike ended.

The major significance of the strikes of the early 1920s is that they brought to the fore for the first time the hidden but fundamental contradictions of the capitalist-dominated colonial economy. The 1920 strike in particular did so with such clarity and force that capital and the state had to resort to violence in order to suppress it. But more importantly, the strikes reinforced the racial mask of class conflict. Never before had the country seen the direct use of Fijians against Indians on such a large scale. State and capital feared that Fijian sympathy for Indian workers might make the upheavals more generalized. By dissuading Fijians from supporting the strikers and by ranging Fijian policemen and special constables against them, the ruling class manipulated the basic antagonistic relationship between capital and labour so as to make it appear racial. It is no coincidence that around this time 'the argument began to be heard that European dominance was necessary to protect the Fijian against the Indians' and that the Deed of Cession was 'a request for protection, not just by Britain, but by the European settlers as well' (Gillion 1977:60-61, emphasis added).

A historic process of class realignment had begun. Labour had mounted the first serious challenge. Capital could not cope by itself. But neither could its dominance be guaranteed by the state. Henceforth Fijian support would be vital and to coax Fijians into an alliance, the carrot (or the stick, depending on how one sees it) was the argument that they too were being threatened by the advancing Indians. Persuaded, the chiefly class entered into an alliance which proved to be capital's salvation. But for those who toiled, the prospect of better times now looked even dimmer.

The 1930s were a period of relative calm in the sugar industry but the outbreak of World War II plunged it again into crisis. The main Allied bases in Fiji were located in northwestern Viti Levu and stationed there were some 70,000 Allied troops, so it is not surprising that the economic effects of the war were felt most keenly in this sugar-dominated region.

As prices and the cost of sugar production soared, the burden on farmers weighed progressively heavier, but sugar wage workers also felt the pinch. In June 1943 600 millworkers in Ba and Lautoka went on strike in support of demands for higher wages. In July the farmers struck for a higher cane price. The millworkers got a wage increase but the cane price was another matter altogether. In the face of the CSR's refusal to raise the cane price, the farmers offered to sell to the state 'if it
would, through a price fixing board, be responsible for the payment of a fair price, but [it] still would not agree to any general formula that would imply that its intervention had put an end to the existing cane purchase agreement’ (ibid.:184). Instead it appointed the Jenkins Commission to investigate the dispute. The Commission recommended against raising the price of cane. Understandably, the farmers rejected all the findings of the Jenkins Commission. Nevertheless, it was only the combined effect of two other developments which eventually ended the strike.

One was an address in January 1944 by Ratu Sukuna to farmers in Nadi in which he delivered a message from the governor advising them to return to work. He added a contribution of his own. Failure to return to work, he threatened, might produce difficulties for renewing their leases. His threat finally broke the back of the strike and the farmers returned to the fields.

The other development which caused the strike to end was the bitter rivalry between the two canegrowers’ associations, the Kisan Sangh and the Maha Sangh. We will look at the details of that rivalry later; here it suffices to make two points. First, because of the rivalry, the strike had already begun to crumble before Sukuna made his threat. Secondly, behind the rivalry lay the machinations of an emergent Indian commercial bourgeoisie. By putting their interests as capitalists ahead of the interests of their farmer cousins, they divided the farming community and opened the way for the strikers’ defeat. Indian farmers were victims of bourgeois Indians.

Defeated, the farmers could only hope that the 1944 Shepard investigation into the economics of the sugar industry, which had been proposed late in the previous year, might recommend more favourably than the Jenkins Commission. They were to be disappointed yet again. Although their real incomes had clearly fallen, the Shepard Report recommended that the cane price remain unchanged (Narsey 1979:113). This sorry defeat of the canefarmers was repeated in 1960 after another strike. They would have to wait until 1970, when the CSR could no longer count on a compliant state, to record their first significant victory.

Caught as they were in the vice-grip of capital, receiving little support from the colonial state and subjected to the worst forms of white racism, the vast majority of Indians had to endure enormous pain. They could do nothing to alleviate their poverty and misery. Nor did the vast majority of Fijians remain unscathed. True their suffering was not as deep or as extensive as that of their more unfortunate Indian counterparts, but they were exploited nonetheless. In short, those who bore the brunt of colonial capitalism were the labouring classes. It is not the case that all Fijians and all Indians were badly off; some fared reasonably well.
By 1944, class differentiation within the Indian community was also well advanced. Within the canefarming community, the vast majority of farmers were small tenant farmers; but there had also emerged a *kulak* class of large farmers who hired Indian wage labour, contracted work to Indian farmers, or simply leased their farms to other Indians. Hence there was much scope for capitalist farmers to exploit their own kith and kin. And they did, often because the leases of their tenants were much less secure than those of farmers tenanted to the CSR. The irony is that some of the leading Indian political figures belonged to this landlord class. A.D. Patel is one example. In 1947 the gross rental from one of his leases was four times as high as that of similar CSR leases (Moynagh 1981:280 note).

While the majority of Indians remained in the sugar industry upon completion of their indenture contracts, many branched out into other activities. Some took up wage employment elsewhere while others set up small businesses, principally in the wholesale and retail trade and in public transportation. Often those businesses were family concerns but increasingly they hired wage labour. Of the Indians who came to Fiji as free immigrants, especially in the early 1920s, many established themselves as agriculturalists, shopkeepers, artisans and professionals, notably lawyers. Education was clearly seen by most Indians as crucial for social advancement. From an early age Indian children were taught, and imbibed, the virtues of discipline, sacrifice and hard work. Their academic success paid off as they came increasingly to preponderate in the civil service and the professions — teaching, medicine, dentistry, accountancy, law and so on.

As a result of these developments there appeared within the Indian community a class of small capitalists, a commercial bourgeoisie, and a professional class. For a long time, however, these bourgeois classes conducted business primarily within their own racial community. Consequently, the Indian working classes, particularly the poor farmers and wage earners, were exploited not only by white capitalists but by capitalists of their own race as well. And it was precisely this kind of class conflict within the Indian community which further compromised the plight of the Indian working masses. Nowhere is that more poignantly illustrated than in the historic struggle for Indian political rights.

5 The process of class differentiation within the Indian community is discussed more fully in Sutherland (1984:114-119).
Political representation: racialism entrenched

Immediately after cession, the interim governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, established the Executive Council. Composed entirely of Europeans, it was a temporary arrangement which ended a year later when Gordon proclaimed the charter of the colony.

The charter established an Executive and a Legislative Council; initially the latter consisted of four official and four unofficial nominated members. Of the four unofficial members, three were representatives of the white planters and European commercial community. But two aspects of Gordon's administration irked local white capital: the preservation of Fijian land rights and the unavailability of sufficient native labour to work European plantations. Moved by that resentment, they agitated for constitutional reform and demanded an enlarged Legislative Council which would have both nominated and elected members. In their own words, that would 'enlarge the powers and constitutional rights of the white population'.

The upshot of their sustained pressure was the Letters Patent of 21 March 1904 which provided for an expanded legislature consisting of ten official members, six elected Europeans and two nominated Fijians. By this time, of course, many indentured workers had completed their contracts but they were still denied political rights.

Further constitutional reform in 1916 increased the size of the Legislative Council from eighteen to twenty-one. Now there were twelve Fijian nominated members and, for the first time, one Indian nominated member. Such token representation propelled the frustrated Indians to intensify their campaign for elected representation.

They were assisted by people like Manilal Doctor and the strike of 1920 which further exposed the terrible plight of Fiji Indians. Although a delegation from India to investigate their condition was promised, it did not arrive until 1922 because of the machinations of capital and the state. Early in 1922 the acting governor reported to London that the idea of an equal franchise for all races was firmly opposed by both Fijian and European opinion. Later that year, J.J. Ragg, a leading European hotelier, sought to ensure that Fijian opposition stood firm. He wrote to a chief and suggested that he

endeavour to permeate the whole of the Fijian race with the fixed idea that the granting of the franchise and equal status to the Indians in Fiji would mean the ultimate loss of all their land and rights, and later their final extinction from the face of the earth (quoted in Gillion 1977:74).

The threat of Fijian extinction was born not only of Indian demands for political equality but also of rising Indian numbers. In 1911 Fijians accounted for 62 per cent of the total population and Indians 29 per
cent. By 1936 the figures had changed to 50 per cent and 43 per cent respectively. The gap between the two major races was narrowed rapidly and by 1946 Indians outnumbered Fijians. Fijian concern about demographic trends is therefore understandable, but for capital, which was predominantly European, it provided the perfect cover behind which to contain labour, which was predominantly Indian. For capital, then, the strategy was clear — to contain labour, contain the Indians and reinforce the racial divide.

Nevertheless, mounting internal and external pressure in the 1920s made it clear that there would have to be some accommodation of Indian political aspirations. But the burning question concerned the form it might take. Indian demands for a common electoral roll had strengthened considerably but the ruling class stoutly resisted. As Gillion observed:

> It was obvious... that with the Indian population increasing in numbers, education and wealth, and in Fiji's plural society, where people were likely, for the foreseeable future, to vote along racial lines, a common roll without reservation of seats for each race would have led eventually to an Indian majority in the Legislative Council, and that, of course, is why it was unacceptable to the other communities (Gillion 1977:139).

So it was that under the constitutional reform of 1929, the system of communal representation was retained. What is more, Indians were given just three seats. Understandably, in September 1929, in the campaign leading up to the elections, the contest for Indian seats was uneventful and unexceptionable. Not so for European seats. J.R. Pearson, the Secretary for Indian Affairs, listened to campaign speeches by Henry Scott and Henry Marks in which they launched bitter attacks against the Indian community. In his words:

> I...was amazed at the way racial prejudices were worked upon and cheers raised from the audience at successive jibes against the Indians. The general attitude was that Indians were not wanted except as labourers and small farmers and must be kept in their place. If they did not like it they could clear out and make room for a more docile set of plantation workers (quoted in ibid.:132).

But the fight for a common roll was not yet over. In November 1929 Vishnu Deo moved in the Legislative Council that Indians be granted a common franchise with the other members of the community. Of course the motion was overwhelmingly defeated and thereupon the

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three newly-elected Indian members resigned their seats in protest. A similar attempt was repeated unsuccessfully three years later. However, by then a major rift had developed within the Indian community. Following the trend in India, Muslims demanded separate representation. Although the demand was not met, the rift was effectively exploited by the colonial state to break the back of the common roll struggle (see Gillion 1977: chapter 7; Ali 1980: chapter 4; Meller and Anthony 1967:16).

As we have noted, hidden beneath the representational struggle was the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour. But there were other secondary contradictions as well. One was the intra-capitalist rivalry between European and Indian capital, particularly in the commercial sector. To the former, any political development which might strengthen the emerging Indian bourgeoisie had to be resisted. Another secondary contradiction was the antagonism between Indian capital and Indian labour; a clear expression of that was the growing indebtedness of Indian workers and farmers to often-unscrupulous Indian moneylenders. It was common for Indian shopkeepers and moneylenders to charge up to 60 per cent interest on loans (Moynagh 1981:129). The Indian working classes shared a common political interest with their bourgeois cousins but were also exploited by them.

Force of circumstance permitted these opposing Indian classes to join together to fight for the political rights they were all denied. But that forced alliance severely compromised the class interests of the Indian masses. The rising Indian bourgeoisie was economically stronger, better educated and more articulate, so it was no accident that they monopolized the leading positions in the wider struggle for greater political rights. But in those positions they, like the ruling state-capital-chief alliance, defined the struggle as a racial one. The fundamental contradiction between capital and labour had already assumed a racial form; the bourgeois Indian leadership made it even more so.

In view of the intense racism against Indians, it is understandable that Indian leaders saw the political struggle as a racial one. But to concede this is not to exonerate them entirely. The fact is that they were not prepared to wage the struggle as one between capital and labour. To do so would have risked their bourgeois class interests: A.D. and S.B. Patel were lawyers; B.L. Hiralal Seth a canegrower; Tahir Singh a ‘rich’ canegrower; Vishnu Deo an accountant and commission agent who drew much of his business from the Gujarati community; M.N.Naidu, V.M. Pillay and Sadhu Kuppuswami were merchants, and C.M.Gopalan and A.D. Sagayam were doctors (Gillion 1977:107, 111, 134).

We do not necessarily question the commitment of these individuals. The point simply is that they saw the struggle as a racial one. As members of an emerging bourgeoisie they could not afford to
redefine it as a class one. The vast majority of Indians belonged to the working classes and for their leaders to have fought the struggle as a class one would have required them to commit ‘class suicide’, something they were unwilling, perhaps unable, to do. Consequently their labouring cousins were the larger losers.

To the ruling class, all this was quite immaterial. Indians were Indians and there was no way that the demand for a common roll would be agreed to. Although Indian members of the Legislative Council continued to advocate it, by 1932 the battle had effectively been lost.

In 1936 an attempt was made to revert to a wholly nominated system of representation and out of the ensuing struggle emerged the compromise of 1937 which introduced parity of racial representation in the Council. In addition to sixteen official members, there were 5 members for each of the three major races. For the Europeans and Indians, three members were to be elected from separate electoral rolls while the remaining two were to be appointed by the state as unofficial members. The five Fijian members were to be appointed by the governor from a list of ten names submitted by the Council of Chiefs. That arrangement lasted until 1963. In the intervening period the question of constitutional development was debated periodically but in the main such debates were variations on old themes:

an unofficial majority, extension of the franchise, the Muslim demand for a separate elected seat, the combined opposition of the Europeans and Fijians to changes leading to a common roll, and their desire to maintain the communal roll system (Meller and Anthony 1967:16-17).

The relative political quiet after 1937 was shattered by a momentous debate in the Legislative Council in July 1946. The country was poised at an historical crossroads. The pressure of the wartime economy was beginning to lift and recent changes in metropolitan colonial policy forced important policy changes in Fiji. More importantly, the balance of class forces in the country had changed significantly. We will discuss this in greater detail below but essentially the situation was as follows: sugar capital was still dominant; the chiefly class was much stronger with the consolidation of the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie, and labour was now much better organized even though its early battles had been costly; local white capital, on the other hand, was in a shaky position and in postwar economic structuring it saw its salvation. In the next chapter we examine the way it sought to engineer a process of economic reorganization towards the development of that industry in which it saw its future to lie — tourism.

An integral part of that wider strategy was the debate of July 1946. The ruling class had been troubled by labour and labour was predominantly Indian. With the economy now entering a new phase,
local white capital sensed that the time was ripe to reaffirm the capitalist path, consolidate the hegemony of the ruling class, and put the Indians in their place — yet again. Such an ideological offensive could only help local white capital's quest to shore up its flagging position.
Chapter 4

Postwar Reorganization: Preparing for the Neocolonial Economy

The immediate causes of the pivotal Legislative Council debate can be traced to the 1943 cane farmers' strike which had been branded by the chiefly elite 'a stab in the back'. When the call went out for men to enlist for military service, Indians were not very forthcoming. Their reluctance, however, was perfectly understandable, consumed as they were with the daily struggle for a decent standard of living, especially in the face of high wartime inflation. In any case, why should they want to fight for the British ruling class which was partly responsible for their material hardships? Also, it was quite reasonable that they should be indignant that they would not be paid the same as Europeans if they did choose to enlist.

But the ruling class saw things differently and the Indian contribution to the war effort came in for criticism, not least from Fijian leaders. Fijians were praised for their patriotism while Indians were condemned for their 'disloyalty'. Moreover, their activities during the 1943 strike were seen as positively selfish and unhelpful. During the Legislative Council debate on the strike, for example, two leading chiefs, Ratu Sukuna and Ratu E. Cakobau, accused Indians of trying to hold the country to ransom and offered Fijian scab labour to cut the cane if the state undertook to buy it (Gillion 1977:184-185).

However reasonable Indian objections to military service might have been, European and Fijian leaders saw only that they were not prepared to fight. Their patriotism and courage were therefore suspect, and their case for equal political rights further undermined. Mayer (1973:70-71) described the situation in this way: '[in terms of the political realities], equal citizenship...called for equal sacrifice'. In a sense he was right but what he did not say was that the view he expressed was part of a ruling ideology which was totally blind to the enormous sacrifices which Indians had made since 1879 — and, what is more, were simply expected to continue to make. For the racists or members of the ruling class it was perfectly consistent that Indians be exploited in the canefields. That had nothing to do with political
obligation. For all the misery they suffered, Indians still had an obligation to fight alongside and in defence of their oppressors!

The resulting legacy of mistrust and hostility was something which Indians could not help. Had they been more forthcoming when the call for enlistment went out, their struggle for political equality might have been successful. But it is difficult to see how, after years of intense anti-Indian feeling, matters could have suddenly improved. Also, had they fought, it would probably have been the lives of Indian workers rather than Indian capitalists that would have been sacrificed. And on return, the survivors would have simply gone back to the canefields and, as usual, made even more sacrifices for the economy. Critics may say that this is pure speculation but the harsh realities of the Indians' past experience lend it a great deal of support.

In any event, racist feelings against the Indian community were strengthened considerably during the war and were given vehement expression by representatives of the ruling class in the Legislative Council in July 1946. That historic debate also served as an occasion not only to reaffirm the virtues of capitalism but also to shore up the flagging position of the weakest fraction of the ruling class at that time, local white capital.

Catharsis in the chamber: Indian is bad, capitalism is good

On 16 July 1946, A.A. Ragg, European member for the Southern Division and a member of a prominent hotelling family, tabled a motion which triggered a debate of enormous significance but about which little is known. His motion read:

That in the opinion of this Council the time has arrived — in view of the great increase in the non-Fijian inhabitants and its consequential political development — to emphasise the terms of the Deed of Cession to assure that the interests of the Fijian race are safeguarded and a guarantee given that Fiji is to be preserved and kept as a Fijian country for all time.

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1 The debate is discussed briefly in Gillion (1977:195-197) and in Norton (1972:93-97).

2 Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 1946, p.163. (Henceforth the Legislative Council Debates will be referred to as Legco).
As he spoke to the motion, the underlying racist motives became more and more evident; the whole thrust of his delivery was directed against the Indians.

Although highly provocative and inflammatory, his speech was a success because the European member was able to play upon understandable Fijian concern about their political and economic position. But lest he be branded a racist, Ragg was quick to make the point that his representations were not due to any desire to belittle the Indians; as he went on to say, he did not have an axe to grind. But that pathetic attempt to soften the impact of his attack was unconvincing. In fact, he anticipated that the Indian members of the council would take strong exception to his views — which they did. Vishnu Deo in particular responded very strongly and his suspicions about the real motives of the motion were not wide of the mark, as we shall see presently.

Ragg's broadside against the Indians represented nothing less than a assault motivated by a desire to consolidate the historically-forged alliance between white capital, the colonial state, the chiefs and the newly-emergent Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie. The justification for the attack took the form, first, of invoking the supposed commitment of the Deed of Cession to the paramountcy of Fijian interests and, secondly, reiterating the point that the Fijian race was still locked in a political, social and economic backwater. These arguments provided for Ragg a point of departure which was unchallengeable and set the stage for an anti-Indian offensive and the glorification of the ruling alliance of which he was a part.

The Indians, he argued, were introduced to assist in the commercial development of the colony but that, he went on, was 'mostly at the expense of the Europeans'. No mention was made of the immense profits which European capital derived from Indian labour. Then came the claim that the 'aliens' had 'been granted equality in the political field with Europeans' and that they enjoyed 'complete freedom of action and enterprise throughout the colony' (sic). Yet in spite of that, they displayed singular ingratitude and audacity: 'their contribution to the war effort was lamentable' and they even attempted to use the war as a bargaining instrument to further their (political) demands (ibid.:170).

But perhaps most importantly, Ragg continued, Indians had 'no responsibility under the Deed of Cession'. In the end that was the crucial argument. What the debate was all about was the need to implement both the letter and the spirit of that hallowed document. And in that task, Europeans had a major part but the Indians none at all. Hence, on the basis of that obligation, Europeans could claim a legitimate right to remain in the country. They were, as Ragg put it, 'co-trustees with the Imperial Government in the Deed of Cession in the care that should be given to the native race'. To ensure that the point
would not be missed, he again reminded the chamber that 'the duty of trusteeship devolves upon Europeans and in this duty the Indians have no part'.

But what of Fijians? The original owners of the land, Ragg noted, 'had placed their fate fully and freely (sic) in the hands of the British Crown' and had always displayed unstinting loyalty to it. It was necessary therefore to take steps to protect them from the Indian threat and beyond that to secure their overall advancement. But, he added, there were obstacles within Fijian society itself: the Fijian communal system; its institutionalized form, the Fijian administration; and, of course, the Fijian's lack of 'character'. On the last matter, Ragg's words speak for themselves:

...character is just what the natives have not. We who work for and among them know, too painfully, how deficient in all manly qualities they are. Courage, honour, firmness, pure ambition, truthfulness, unselfishness — these and kindred qualities are all too rare....they mean well, but being deficient in character they are weak and the victims of circumstances (ibid.).

That such open affrontery passed unchallenged testifies to the dominance of white capital within the ruling class. Ragg slighted the Fijian communal system and the Fijian Administration and he heaped scorn on Fijians for their 'lack of character'. And this after they had so recently displayed selfless courage in the field of battle. Yet not a single Fijian member of the council rose to defend his people against the disparaging and utterly racist remarks that had been meted out with such arrogance and disdain.

Ragg was a master of manipulation. Behind his anti-Fijian remarks lurked a much larger design — the containment of class pressure by deepening racial antagonism. And his Machiavellian artistry is demonstrated by the way he likened the Fijian 'communal' system to 'socialism and communism'. That was truly a masterstroke because it allowed him to exploit to great advantage the deep ideological bias against communism which permeated every level of Fijian society. The comparison served both as a rationalization for his attack on indigenous society and as a springboard from which to launch his case about the superiority of capitalism. His grasp of the particularities of Fiji politics was outstanding. So too the dexterity and finesse with which he manipulated them for political gain.

Realizing that political consciousness among the Indian labouring classes was on the increase, he could not afford to appear too blatant a spokesman for white capital. His case for the superiority and desirability of capitalism could not take the form of open praise. A cover was needed and the perfect one was provided by the church.
Consequently he set about applauding the policy of the Wesleyan Mission in Fiji which, he said, had been 'to promote individualism among the natives'. His target audience, of course, was the Fijians and knowing full well that they were predominantly Methodist he sent out the message that if the church was promoting individualism, then surely it must be a good thing.

Having lambasted Indians for their greed, ingratitude and political precociousness, berated Fijians for their personal deficiencies and backward form of social organization, and castigated the colonial state for persisting with policies which obstructed the development of individualism among Fijians, the stage was now set to present the European as the saviour. The pace of indigenous development had been hindered by the sorts of factors he had just outlined and because Fijians were not yet able to stand on their own feet the continued support and guiding hand of the white man, Ragg intimated, was clearly essential. Moreover, Ragg was convinced, it was only the white man who could provide the necessary support. The Europeans, after all, had made the greatest contribution to the country over the last 150 years.

[Europeans] colonised and transformed Fiji from a barbarous country into a civilised one; they instituted a stable government; they are responsible for the economic development of the Colony. They gave their best in the two wars; they have been the mainstay of Government during times of internal trouble (ibid.).

Ragg's strategy worked perfectly. With the enticement of Fijian support as his major objective, he juxtaposed Fijian deficiency and Indian evil with European benevolence, valour and virtue. At root, he argued, the problem was an Indian one and Fijian salvation depended critically on European support. In other words, the fundamental contradiction confronting Fiji was racial and not class. At the level of appearance, of course, it was a fairly accurate picture of Fiji society and was well received by various European, and more importantly Fijian, members of the Council. To be sure, the argument Ragg advanced had been prevalent in Fiji for a long time but the significance of his delivery lies in the fact that he successfully reinforced it at a crucial historical juncture.

The country was at a turning point: the balance of class forces had changed significantly, and largely to the disadvantage of local white capital. As the ruling class set about making the transition to a peacetime economy, there was much discussion about the best way forward. Also, because self-government for the colonies had recently been proclaimed as policy by the newly-elected Labour government in Britain, the country's constitutional status was thrust back onto the political agenda.
The confluence of these events, set against a historical background of political agitation by Indians and, more importantly, the struggles waged against capital by the Indian labouring classes, had opened up a threat, however slight, to the ruling class, but more particularly to local white capital. The latter, as we shall see, was greatly concerned at being electorally swamped by Indians and part-Europeans. Ragg had stated that his motion to the council was put forward in view of the great increase in the ‘non-Fijian’ inhabitants and its consequential ‘political’ development. The adjective non-Fijian was clearly intended as a camouflage. Fortunately, however, in the ensuing debate, that smokescreen was penetrated and the underlying motives exposed.

Essentially, then, Ragg’s initiative in the council represented a marshalling of forces, an attempt to consolidate the interests he represented. He recognized very clearly that the most effective way to defend those interests was to exploit racial antagonisms. His strategy was a shining example of ideological manipulation. By equating things European, and to a lesser extent Fijian, with good and things Indian with evil, he reinforced the whole ideology of racialism. Here was the politics of race at work and the only question that had yet to be settled was the tactical one about how the supposed Indian threat should be dealt with. Concrete measures had to be found to contain the Indian ogre but who was to lead the way in that highly sensitive task? The way that Ragg tackled that question showed him up as the shrewd political calculator that he was.

Ragg was of course concerned that Europeans avoid as much as possible situations where they might lay themselves open to charges of racism. For them to take the initiative, therefore, was politically risky. Hence he sought to shift the burden onto other shoulders. In fact the groundwork had already been laid: he had projected the image of the European as the guardian of native interests and therefore duty-bound to raise the alarm about Indian domination. All that now remained was to plant the idea that responsibility for taking concrete initiatives to deal with the threat rested in other quarters. Once taken, of course, the Europeans would follow.

Fijian initiative was what he sought but if similar action were to be taken by the colonial state then so much the better. He appealed to Fijian leaders to ‘go out among their people and awaken them to the reality of the situation’. He then turned to the governor and urged him to rise up against the common foe:

Take up the cudgels for the Fijian people who have so loyally done their duty to the King and Empire and you will erect in the minds of a grateful and increasing Fijian people a monument more lasting than brass and, you, Sir, they will remember always as their saviour and their friend (ibid.:172).
Stirring stuff indeed, and although his original motion was eventually amended to appear innocuous, there can be no doubt that the spokesman for white capital had scored a major victory.

The First Native Member, Ratu G. Tuisawau, seconded Ragg’s motion and hot on his heels came the Third Native Member, Ratu T. Vuiyasawa, who said:

This motion as it stands concerns the future well-being of my people, who are likely to be overwhelmed or swamped by this Colossus of Indian domination in this Colony. This problem...must be solved before it is too late...I support the motion (ibid.).

Ratu G. Toganivalu began his contribution to the debate by saying that he would be failing in his duty if he did not support the motion. Ratu E. Mataitini echoed the sentiments of his Fijian colleagues but, in addition, lavished Ragg with praise:

I support this motion because to my knowledge it is the first time for many years that someone has had the courage to table and speak on a motion of this kind (ibid.:178).

With such solid backing from the Fijian members, and also from European members like W.G. Johnson and H.B. Gibson, victory could hardly have eluded Ragg. Johnson captured the thrust of the arguments which came from the representatives of local white capital:

...the European people and the Fijian people see today fairly clearly that within the space of a few years it is inevitable that the Indian people will have a vast numerical superiority and that the time may come when they will try to take power unto themselves in this Colony, and then we will be faced with the unhappy state of affairs that is occurring in Palestine today (ibid.:175).

He went on:

[The Europeans’] association with the Fijians in the past is one which has been almost completely acceptable to the Fijians and the Fijians have never regretted that association created in 1874; and if they could turn back time and have the opportunity of re-considering their position they would not do otherwise than follow in the same footsteps that their forefathers took then (ibid.).

The ‘ever-present fear’ of ‘eventual Indian domination’ had a demographic basis. During the debate, Ragg put the Fijian and Indian populations at 119,000 and 130,000 respectively, a difference of 14,000. But according to the latest estimates, which in fact had been
tabled before the council only a week before, the figures as at December 1945 were 115,724 and 117,256 respectively, a difference of only 1,500. Despite the fact that Ragg clearly exaggerated the difference, the point remained that Indians had outstripped Fijians. Moreover, the population growth rate for Fijians was much lower than that of Indians. That being so, Ragg was well-placed to mount his attack. What, then, of the counter-offensive?

The blatantly racist character of Ragg’s assault did provoke a defence of sorts from a few European members of the Council but it is significant that those who spoke out were all expatriates, not locals. The Commissioner of Labour, for example, had this to say of the Indians:

[They] are a frugal, thrifty, industrious people who can be called the very sinews of our economy. The Fijians owe much of their advancement and security to the material wealth that is derived from the efforts of other races of the colony (ibid.:197).

The acting secretary for Fijian Affairs concurred:

...it is a self-evident fact that the progress which the colony has made since Cession would not have been possible if the Indians had not been brought in to satisfy the cry of the plantation owners for more and more labour, and if the present Indian population were suddenly to vanish...our prosperity would burst like a pricked bubble and we should leave the Fijians in no better state than that in which we found them (ibid.:188).

And as for Ragg’s basic argument that the major problem facing the country was the increasing Indian population, the acting director of Medical Services believed it quite mistaken. The problem was not the racial aspect of the population increase but simply the increase in overall numbers:

the major problem facing Fiji at the present time is not a different composition of one component in numbers as opposed to other racial components of the population. It is not that at all. It is the absolute increase of the population, whatever its racial composition (ibid.:183).

That these arguments seem to have carried some weight is suggested by the fact that the original motion was eventually amended. In particular, the offending reference to the political consequences of the increase in the non-Fijian population was deleted. In its amended form, the motion now read:
That in the opinion of this Council the time has arrived to emphasise the terms of the Deed of Cession to ensure that the interests of the Fijian race are safeguarded (ibid.:214).

What about the response from Indian members? K.B. Singh described Ragg’s motion as ‘mischievous’ and asked why the state did not care to take action against Ragg under the Sedition Ordinance for ‘setting one section of the community against another’. The Indians, he went on to say, had not in the past interfered with the rights of the Fijian people and he claimed that it was not the Indian but the European community who had ‘kept the Fijian down’. To back that up, he pointed to European monopoly of freehold land and white racism in the colonial civil service.

Similar sorts of arguments were later made by B.M. Gyneshwar, A.R. Sahu Khan, A.D. Patel, and Vishnu Deo. Without exception, however, they all employed racial categories. K.B. Singh, for example, spoke of ‘European’ capital, ‘Indian’ labour and ‘Fijian’ land; A.D. Patel made reference to ‘Fijians’ spending their money in ‘European’ or ‘Chinese’ concerns; and Vishnu Deo spoke of ‘European’ vested interests. Here were representatives of a people who were exploited first and foremost by capital and yet they persisted with racist perceptions. A major reason for that, as we suggested earlier, is that they were themselves bourgeois and, therefore, would not jeopardize their own interests by adopting a class perspective. For them, Ragg’s attack was simply an instance of racial prejudice, nothing more. The pervasiveness of racist thinking was here given its finest expression.

Not once during the entire debate was reference made to the activities of the CSR, Burns Philip Limited, Morris Hedstrom Limited, the Emperor Gold Mines or any other capitalist enterprise. But there was one allusion to capital. K.B. Singh claimed that Europeans were fearful of ‘Indians who have come to a state where they are competing with European merchants’. That was a most telling statement.

Of all the fractions of capital to lash out at, why did he single out the European merchants? Precisely because it was with white commercial capital that the emerging Indian commercial bourgeoisie was in greatest competition. What is more, the connections between the latter and Indian council members were close. Patel was a Gujarati lawyer with strong ties with the Gujarati commercial community. Vishnu Deo was an accountant. K.B. Singh belonged to the Arya Samaj. And Sahu Khan was an Ahmadyya. (The Arya Samaj and the Ahmadyya are the unorthodox sects of the Hindu and Muslim communities respectively, and prominent in the leadership of each were wealthy individuals.)
With those sorts of connections, therefore, it was never likely that the Indian members would pursue the matter of capitalist exploitation of the Indian working classes too far. To have done so would have meant running the risk of compromising not only their own interests but also those of Indian capitalists to whom they were connected. It was perfectly acceptable to point to the racial aspect of intra-capitalist rivalries but to expose the exploitative side of capitalists generally would be highly detrimental.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the whole thrust of the Indian counter-offensive was that Ragg’s attack was basically an assault on Indians as a race. Ragg adopted a racialist approach; they responded in like manner. Clearly, all the fractions of capital shared a common interest in maintaining a racial definition of politics.

There is one final but crucial aspect of the Indian counter-offensive. Vishnu Deo, who spearheaded the Indian response, argued that the real reason behind Ragg’s motion was to settle the question of the electoral system. That was an issue on which the Indian members could speak with some authority; they had fought a long battle over it. But more significantly, it was an issue which did not pose a fundamental threat to Indian bourgeois interests.

In 1943 Alport Barker proposed that municipal corporations be constituted through an elective system and in August of that year a Select Committee consisting of four Europeans (including Barker as chairman) and Vishnu Deo investigated the proposal. The committee’s report was submitted to the governor in the following October but was not tabled before the council until the following year. The major recommendation was that there should be a common electoral roll for municipal elections, and in May 1946 the European Electors Association issued a memorandum headed ‘Common Roll Principle Adopted in Municipal Bill’. However, when the governor opened the July 1946 session of the council, he made this statement:

In the light of comments received and after further careful consideration of the matter, it has been decided not to proceed with the Bill as published in draft, for...it is not proposed to have a common roll, but instead, the communal roll system (Legco 1946:172).

To the Indian members, this smacked of collusion between the colonial state and the white community. But why the change of heart? The immediate reason, as Deo pointed out, was that on the basis of the franchise qualifications set out in the major report of the Select

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Committee, Europeans would probably dominate the Suva Municipal Council but not the Lautoka one. This was a situation they wished to avoid — after all, Lautoka was in the major sugar region. But there was another reason.

The day before the debate, the Fiji Times and Herald carried a report on the colonial debate in the House of Commons during which the secretary of state for the colonies, Mr George Hall, outlined the newly-elected Labour government's colonial policy:

...it is our policy to develop the colonies and all their resources in such a way as to enable their people speedily and substantially to improve their social and economic conditions and as soon as may be practicable to attain responsible self-government (Fiji Times 15 July 1946).

With self-government for the colonies now on the political agenda, the question of the electoral system took on renewed urgency. Pressure could now be applied from London for Fiji to adopt the British electoral system based on a common roll. The prospect of such pressure being exerted was heightened by the fact that the Labour government openly professed its socialist leanings.

The governor's reaffirmation of the system of communal rolls on 12 July 1946 was therefore very welcome but there was still a degree of uncertainty. With an election due in the following year, Ragg called upon the Labour government to make an 'unequivocal statement' of its intentions (Legco 1946:172). The numerically superior Indians had to be kept at bay and support from London would help. But then came the crunch.

According to Vishnu Deo, even with the communal electoral system, there was no guarantee of European electoral success — and the Europeans realized it. Why? Because they could no longer count on the unquestioning loyalty of part-Europeans:

...the European members...fear the part-Europeans. The part-Europeans are organising themselves...They know what benefits or advantages they have received from the members they have so far been electing. They know also that the members so far elected...seek to enfranchise civil servants. Why? Because they fear that the part-Europeans will not have that confidence in them and they will not be returned unless they counterbalance the half-caste votes with the European votes in the Civil Service (ibid.:190).

The population census in October 1946 put the European and part-European populations at 4,594 and 6,129 respectively, so Deo was correct — even with the communal system of representation, European political power could no longer be guaranteed. For Deo, therefore, the
whole purpose of Ragg's motion was to whip up anti-Indian sentiment and to project the image of the European as the defender of both the Fijian and the national interest. In that way, continued part-European electoral support might be secured; after all, part-Europeans had blood ties with the Fijians.

Despite the defeat of the common roll struggle in the early 1930s, the representatives of local white capital had been willing to test it out. But as soon as it became evident that their interests would suffer under that system, they retreated and immediately sought to justify and entrench its opposite, the system of communal rolls. That was a very crucial development because it meant that any future attempts to resurrect the call for a common roll — and there were some — would not have much chance of success.

The debate of July 1946, then, was essentially a response by fractions of the ruling class to underlying class tensions which were greatly aggravated by the racial aspects of demographic change and the impact of World War II. Changes in metropolitan colonial policy threatened to worsen those tensions even more.

Within the ruling class, the position of local white capital was the most shaky. Masters of the politics of race, the representatives of local white capital engineered the debate to defend their class interests by playing on the Achilles heel of the class struggle in Fiji, its racial form. Ably led by Ragg, they played on the threat of Indian political domination with devastating effectiveness and their victory on the common roll issue cemented the racialist rules of the electoral game.

The Indian political leaders played right into their hands because they too regarded the struggle in racial terms. In so doing they safeguarded their own class interests and those of other bourgeois Indians. Of course, the ultimate losers were the vast majority of those they supposedly represented — the Indian working classes. Severely disadvantaged by a political system which saw them as Indians rather than workers, they were compromised even more by a bourgeois leadership which was unwilling to represent them as labouring people.

In sum, the catharsis of July 1946 strongly reinforced the ideology and politics of race. At the same time it reaffirmed the capitalist development path and, very importantly, helped to shore up the uncertain position of local white capital. The way was now clear for that fraction of the ruling class to consolidate its position even more. A major process of restructuring to lay the foundations of a neocolonial economy was about to occur. Local white capital was intent on steering the course of events towards the development of that sector which they thought had the greatest potential for them — the tourist industry. State planning would soon be introduced for the first time and in that they saw the key to their strategy.
Restructuring towards tourism

In a major departure from the earlier principle that its colonies should be self-sufficient, Britain announced in February 1940 that it would now assume a more direct responsibility for colonial development and it passed the Colonial Development and Welfare Act. To facilitate development projects, imperial funds would now be made available on a much more extensive scale, but in order to qualify for assistance under the act, colonies were required to submit development plans. That set the scene for state planning in Fiji and local white capital intervened in the planning process to strengthen the industry in which it thought its future lay — tourism. Here was the chance they were looking for to restructure the economy. The foundations of the second pillar of Fiji’s neocolonial economy had been laid some decades earlier but it would soon be galvanized.

By the early 1920s a few local Europeans were well-established in the hotel business. Although relatively small, the tourist traffic was steady and hoteliers felt a need for more coordination and planning. Accordingly, in May 1923 the White Settlement League, an organization dominated by Suva businessmen, formed the Suva Tourist Board which in 1925 was renamed the Fiji Publicity Board and Tourist Bureau.

It was the first organized attempt at constituting a tourist industry in Fiji. Foreign capital had a significant interest in the nascent industry but the burden of ensuring its early survival fell largely on local tourist capital. The early years were hard. Persistent requests to the colonial state for financial assistance yielded little. For the state, tourism was simply not a priority area and it continually resisted pleas for increased funding. The continuing tussle, which subsided during the war, intensified in the late 1940s. By then, tourist capital’s fortunes had begun to change for the better.

It was common knowledge in business circles that the Colonial Welfare and Development Act of 1940 was intended primarily to provide assistance towards capital schemes, and for local tourist capital that was crucial. Direct state assistance to the fledgling tourist industry might still be low but at least the state could now be pressured into providing the improved infrastructure that would be necessary if tourism was to grow. What better way to achieve that than to intervene directly in state planning.

In May 1944 the governor appointed the Postwar Planning and Development Committee to make recommendations about the future direction of the country. Included in the committee were H.H.Ragg, W.G.Johnson, and A. Barker (who was chairman of the Suva Town Board and a director of the Fiji Times). The committee’s report was
submitted to London in October 1946 and was rejected for its excessive emphasis on social services. After a critical review it was resubmitted only to be rejected again in February 1948. London then called for a new plan to follow several specific guidelines, one of which was an emphasis on projects of 'definite economic value'.

For that task, a Development Revision Committee was formed. It was larger than its predecessor and, significantly, local European representation was increased from three to five. Submitted in November 1949, the committee's report was accepted. It conformed to the guidelines laid down and, in particular, as Table 4.1 shows, to 'productive projects'.

Although the authors of the report noted that Fiji's wealth lay in agriculture, they paid little attention to the country's two major crops, sugar and coconut. They justified that on the grounds that both were doing well and therefore did not require assistance. Sugar and copra prices were high at the time but the main beneficiaries were the CSR and the few local Europeans who owned large coconut plantations. The plight of the working classes which actually produced the crops mattered little to the committee. So rather than setting funds aside to improve the lot of those who produced the country's wealth, the committee chose to divert state funds to other schemes.

Table 4.1: Planned Sectoral Allocations: 1945 and 1949

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1945 (%)</th>
<th>1949 (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Production and development of natural resources (economic schemes)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications and general</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.35</td>
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<td></td>
<td>100</td>
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The two largest allocations included under the heading 'Production and development of natural resources' were for feeder roads (£455,000) and the proposed Navua hydroelectric scheme (£566,000).
Postwar reorganization

These are clearly infrastructural expenditures and should therefore have been included under 'Communications and general'. If we reclassify those two items, then the allocations in Table 4.1 look quite different. A comparison of the two sets of figures appears in Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2 Original and Reclassified Development Plan</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Reclassified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production and development of natural resources</td>
<td>36.05</td>
<td>12.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>25.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications and general</td>
<td>34.25</td>
<td>58.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reclassified figures clearly show that the committee's statements about agriculture were not matched by any real commitment to improve the material circumstances of the vast majority of the labouring masses in that sector. A clue to the real thinking behind the report is its statement that 'many private enterprises in the colony had ambitions for expansion' (Report of the Economic Review Committee 1953:10). The influence of representatives of local white capital — H.E. Snell, W. Gatward, A.A. Ragg and P. Costello — was beginning to have impact. Without an adequate infrastructure, local white capital's ambitious plans would be frustrated. Consequently, fully 58 per cent of all planned allocations were set aside for such infrastructural projects as a hydroelectric scheme, an international airport, roading, port facilities and the upgrading of the country's main telephone exchange. The push was on but for what specifically?

The committee did make recommendations for the establishment of 'secondary industries'. Industrial expansion, it argued, was generally a function of agricultural growth but agriculture was still at a stage where there was little or no opportunity for further industrial development. However, if the situation changed it was 'expected that private
enterprise would take advantage of the circumstances’. Why private enterprise? Because ‘government, by the nature of its organisation, is not fitted to take direct part in industrial undertakings’ (ibid.). On the other hand, private capital could not be ‘driven’ into industry; it could only be ‘attracted’: ‘our duty is to advise how conditions can be created which will attract private capital’ (ibid.).

Advise it did, and fortuitously in the one area local white capital pinned all its hopes:

The tourist industry is one which can be of considerable economic value to the Colony... We understand that the [Fiji Visitors Bureau] has been asked to place before Government specific proposals for increasing this industry, and we consider that Government should consider ways and means of assisting the industry (without necessarily taking part), particularly in questions of finance (ibid.:14).

The future of the country, the report argued, would rest in large part on a tourist industry controlled by private capital. Hence the push by local capital paid off and the colonial state endorsed the importance of tourism and its ‘great future’. Ironically, developments over the next few years show that the ‘great future’ would belong not to local white capital but to foreign capital.

A hurricane in 1952 and an earthquake in 1953 caused extensive damage to tourist establishments. Local capital had been concerned for a long time to obtain more hotel accommodation; the natural disasters simply heightened the urgency. But requests for state finance were continually turned down. Private attempts were made to attract foreign capital instead but again without success. Consequently in 1956 the matter was resubmitted to the colonial state. In that year the Fiji Publicity Bureau became the Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB) and its chairman, W.G. Johnson, sought and received state help to seek financial assistance from the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Yet by the end of 1957 nothing had materialized; even the FVB’s own attempts to secure foreign capital produced nothing.

Two points were abundantly clear: foreign capital would be necessary for the development of tourism; and conditions in Fiji were not yet sufficiently attractive to draw in that much-needed capital. Incentives therefore had to be provided. Even the governor admitted that ‘there is a need for some positive stimulus to investment’ (Legco 1957:188). Heartened, the FVB made submissions to the colonial state.

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about the kinds of incentives it preferred and in December 1958 the Legislative Council debated the _Hotels Aid Bill_.

However, the bill was unacceptable to local white capital because its minimum levels of expenditure to qualify for state concessions were too high. The Financial Secretary explained:

What we need urgently is something really big, a major step forward in hotel accommodation...and we believe that the figures we have put into the Bill will be required (_Legco_ 1958:592).

The colonial state was clearly intent upon a scale of expansion which only foreign capital could undertake, and if foreign capital was to be enticed, then competition from local capital would have to be kept to a minimum. To ensure that, concessions would be made more accessible to foreign than to local capital. The colonial state’s bias towards foreign capital, already evident in the sugar industry, was now beginning to show in relation to tourism.

The reaction from local capital was immediate and strong. Representatives like H.B. Gibson argued, correctly, that the bill discriminated against local entrepreneurs and cautioned about the danger of a tourist industry monopolized ‘by just a few’. The state relented and lowered the minimum expenditure levels. The amended bill was passed as the _Hotel Aid Ordinance_ of 1958. Two years later the levels were reduced further with the passage of the _Hotel Aid (Amendment) Ordinance_ of 1960.

This second success owed much to the support given local capital by the Burns Commission. On the matter of direct financial state assistance for hotel expansion the Commission did not suggest preferential treatment for local capital. Nevertheless, it saw no reason why applications could not be made to the Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board ‘which would judge the merits of any individual proposal for loan finance for hotels against proposals from other industries’5 Its advice was heeded by local capital, for as we shall note later, in the 1960s and early 1970s by far the largest loans given by the Board were for tourism projects.

The Burns Commission’s recommendations on other facets of the tourist industry are also important because they formed the basis of subsequent state policy: the upgrading and tarsealing of the Suva-Nadi road, liberalizing licensing laws, declaring Nadi and Suva duty-free

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ports, improving passenger facilities in and around Nadi airport and the Suva wharf, and raising the state subsidy to the Fiji Visitors Bureau.

Local white capital welcomed the 1960 ordinance and the recommendations of the Burns Commission and continued to harbour hopes of dominating the industry it had so assiduously sought to cultivate. But the dream was soon shattered. With the capitalist postwar boom came a sharp increase in international tourism and the growing Fiji tourist industry soon attracted international capital.

The Fiji Visitors Bureau had been a member of the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) since 1951. In 1958, in conjunction with the United States Department of Commerce, PATA commissioned the services of an American firm, Checchi and Company, to undertake a survey of the tourism potential in the Pacific and Far East regions. Concluding that tourism in those regions was far below its potential, the Checchi Report called for a quadrupling of tourism between 1958 and 1968. For international capital, it was a vital signal and, pertinently, the report painted a glowing picture of Fiji’s tourist potential and specifically recommended that ‘money [be] pumped into the Fijian economy from outside’.

Later we shall see that the report’s glowing prognosis about the future of tourism in Fiji could in fact have been much brighter. As it turned out, the performance of the Fiji tourist industry greatly surpassed the expectations of the report. It is not surprising, therefore, that tourism in Fiji soon came under the control of foreign capital. The industry which local white capital strove so hard to develop and dominate was soon lost to foreign competitors.

By the 1960s, then, the process of economic restructuring that began immediately after the war was all but complete. But for those who had initiated that class project, it was in vain. And local white capital’s shaky position was soon undermined further. Over the fifteen years or so during which economic restructuring took place other major developments also occurred. Of particular importance was the increasing strength of organized labour. Two major strikes in 1955 and 1957 demonstrated labour’s growing willingness to defend its position through organized struggle. At the same time, however, the strikes alerted capital and the colonial state to the need for greater control. If foreign capital was to be enticed into the tourist industry, labour would have to be contained. With the oilworkers’ strike of 1959, therefore, the task of class containment took on a new urgency.

The strike of ‘59 marked a turning in Fiji’s history. Coming at the end of restructuring, it represented a fundamental threat to the

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neocolonial economy — more so since it was followed by a cane farmers' strike in 1960. The future trajectory of neocolonial Fiji had just been mapped out and the ruling class would not permit it to be jeopardized by labour. To better appreciate the significance of the strikes and also of their suppression, we need first to survey briefly the rise of organized labour.
Chapter 5

Turbulence at the Turning Point

The rise of organized labour

The first union in Fiji, an association of European teachers at Methodist mission schools, was formed in 1924. Four years later a Suva Teachers Association was formed and in 1931 the two amalgamated into the Fiji Teachers’ Union. However, later native Fijian teachers broke away and established their own Fijian Teachers’ Association, a split that has persisted to the present day.

In 1937 Ayodhya Prasad, a North Indian school teacher who arrived in the colony in 1926, founded the Kisan Sangh (Farmers Union). Securing CSR recognition of the union, however, turned out to be a much more difficult task than Prasad had anticipated. The irony is that Prasad misguidedly believed that the most effective way forward was to collaborate with the company.

At first the CSR ignored the union, hoping that it would somehow go away, but then decided to defeat the union while it was still in its infancy; better to annihilate the fledgling enemy than to let it develop strength. The colonial state, however, viewed the CSR strategy as potentially disruptive, and refused to allow the lifeblood of the economy to be subjected to such risk. Hence it prodded the CSR into a more conciliatory posture. On 30 May 1941 the union was recognized.

Prasad believed that only by cooperating with the company would the farmers secure concessions that would raise their real income (Moynagh 1981:160). Nonetheless some farmers remained distrustful of the CSR. Long term reconciliation of grower and company interests, they felt, was impossible and the Kisan Sangh’s collaborative approach was inherently contradictory. In the end farmer interests would be compromised. The atmosphere of distrust and apprehension soon produced a rival canegrowers’ organization.

Prominent among the Kisan Sangh’s concerns was the high level of farmer indebtedness. To solve the problem it established a cooperative store through which members could purchase goods fairly cheaply. This development had important consequences for the two
fractions of capital which had the greatest and most direct impact on farmers and caneworkers — the CSR and the Indian merchant traders. For the CSR, the development was welcome. The Kisan Sangh would now spend more time on its cooperative venture and less on trying to increase the price of cane. Relieved of much pressure, the company gave moral and financial support to the cooperative (ibid.:163). But for Indian merchant traders the cooperative represented a fundamental threat to their profits. Most of their dealings were with farmers and caneworkers, and the high prices and interest rates they charged were the very reasons for the formation of the cooperative. Trader business practices were considered unscrupulous and it was to rescue rural Indians from the clutches of rapacious Indian traders that the Sangh set up the cooperative.

By this time also a major cleavage had developed within the Indian community between those of north Indian and those of south Indian origin. Its real basis was differences in wealth. North Indians, resident in the country longer, tended to be more prosperous and have a greater stake in the existing order. Their substantial support for the Kisan Sangh, and in particular its strategy of collaboration, is therefore easy to explain. As Moynagh put it:

They had more to lose than South Indians from a strategy of confrontation that [in the past had] failed, and yet they stood to gain from concessions won through co-operation (ibid.:160).

South Indians, in contrast, were generally less well-off. Indian merchants played on this substantial difference when they planned their defence against the threat posed by the Kisan Sangh’s cooperative. In alliance with south Indians, and through the leadership of the Gujerati lawyer A.D. Patel, the Indian commercial bourgeoisie set about undermining support for the Kisan Sangh. On 5 June 1941 they formed a rival organization, the Akhil Fiji Krishak Maha Sangh. Its leader, Swami Rudrananda, was south Indian.

In terms of class organization, farmers were now deeply divided. They had to contend with class enemies on two fronts — the CSR and their capitalist cousins. Two years later during the cane farmers strike of 1943, the bitter rivalry between the Kisan and the Maha Sangh greatly weakened the farmers’ position and helped destroy the strike. Bourgeois Indian leadership had again compromised Indian labour.

At Lautoka on 3 April 1938 the Mazdur Sangh (Workers’ Union) was formed but it was not registered until 9 December 1944 when its name was changed to the Chini Mazdur Sangh (Sugar Workers’ Union). Lacking both numbers and the influential leadership of the farmers’ associations, the Chini Mazdur Sangh remained a minor force for a long time but as the first organization of industrial workers it served as a model for later unions.
The early 1940s were a lean period for the newly-born trade union movement. In part this was due to the war but a major reason had to do with antagonisms between the movement on the one hand and Australian capital and the colonial state on the other.

Because of growing concern in Britain about the welfare and aspirations of its colonial subjects, a committee was appointed in 1930 to consider the whole question of labour policy in the colonies. Despatches were sent out in that year urging all colonies to introduce legislation giving legal rights to trade unions. In Fiji the call was ignored for twelve years.

By the mid 1930s Australian dominance in the Fiji economy had extended beyond the sugar sector into gold-mining. Australian capital was therefore in a powerful position to resist the introduction of ‘enlightened’ labour laws, which it did. Not surprisingly, by 1944 there were only three trade unions in the country. By 1949, however, the number had risen to fifteen. Why the sudden increase?

The pressure in Britain for the enactment of ‘enlightened’ labour laws in the colonies was greatly increased with the passage of the Colonial Welfare and Development Act of 1940 which said that support for development projects was conditional upon the existence of trade union legislation. This was something which the colonial state in Fiji could not ignore, even if capital might have wanted to. The first test was the Kisan Sangh’s application for recognition by the CSR. As we have already seen, the Company had to be prodded by the state into recognition. But the major consequence of that development was that it established the principle of free collective bargaining and led to the passage of the Industrial Associations Ordinance and Industrial Disputes (Conciliation and Arbitration) Ordinance of 1942. The way was now clear for other unions to emerge and over the next five years to 1947 they increased in number five-fold.

Enactment of the ordinances did not mean that the colonial state’s underlying antagonism towards labour had changed fundamentally. As Jay Reddy (1974:62) put it, the colonial state ‘did not always share the Colonial Office policy of encouraging trade unionism’. Despite the liberal appearance of the new legislation, the state encouraged the formation of some unions merely ‘as a matter of administrative convenience’. Others it repressed by victimizing their members and by refusing to recognize their legal status, and to others still it ‘displayed an attitude of indifference’ (ibid.). That being so, the trade union movement grew very slowly over the next few years. Of course the nascent movement confronted other problems — inadequate resources, organizational deficiencies, and a relative scarcity of effective and experienced leaders. Consequently, many of the early unions were shortlived.
In spite of all that, the unions which did survive were generally able to consolidate themselves sufficiently to provide the essential substructure for the establishment of a continuous link between workers and their organizations. Initially such unions were strongest in the sugar-milling, mining, stevedoring, seafaring and public works sector. As numbers grew, the movement gained in strength. Nevertheless it was still quite vulnerable. Mohammed Ramzan (later to become minister for Labour in the Alliance government) described the problems and fragility of the early years in this way:

Joining unions meant inviting trouble, intimidation and victimization... Employers could not tolerate trade unions as they were construed as a challenge to their authority — something which was unbearable to them. In those early days leadership too was scarce and difficult to come by and unions had very little resources to work with. Those who accepted any positions of responsibility in unions were invariably ostracised to the extent of dismissal. Their prospect of future employment was doomed and their names were whispered around to employers for black listing ... Those were the early days of the struggle — a struggle for self respect and recognition. It was a struggle for workers' dignity... This battle for... survival was by no means an easy one and to make matters even more difficult even the Government of the day was against trade unionism (FTUC 1976:4).

Survival therefore became dependent upon size and a national organization was clearly necessary. Soon one emerged. In August 1951 the minister of state for the colonies, Mr Dugdale, visited Fiji and met a union delegation led by Pandit Ami Chandra. It is significant that the meeting was held in Lautoka and that of the five unions represented at the discussions four were based predominantly in northwestern Viti Levu — the Chini Mazdur Sangh, the Fijian Mineworkers Union, the Fiji Airport Employees Union, and the Fiji Public Works Department Employees Union (ibid.:39). Since the industrial working class was concentrated in that region, worker organization was most highly developed there.

After their meeting with Dugdale, the representatives of the five unions signed a document which included this statement:

We, the representatives of various unions assembled here today agree to form a Federation of Unions with the object of promoting and safeguarding the interests of the working class generally (ibid.).

The document was subsequently ratified by the respective unions and on 29 September 1951 the Fiji Industrial Workers Congress, the
movement’s first umbrella organization, was formed. When the Fiji Timber Industrial Workers’ Union at Nadarivatu joined the Congress soon after, the affiliated membership of the national organization represented about one third of existing unions. The congress was modelled on its British counterpart and in 1954 changed its name to the Fiji Trades Union Congress.

As Table 5.1 shows, the number and intensity of trade union strikes did not increase significantly until the mid 1950s. The movement was still in its infancy and had not yet developed sufficient strength and confidence. Furthermore, the country was still recovering from the effects of war. But by 1955 things began to change.

Strikes by goldminers at Vatukoula in 1947 and 1955 and by the Sugar Employees Union (the Chini Mazdur Sangh) in northwestern Viti Levu in 1957 were very disruptive. Never before had strike activity reached such major proportions. The colonial state reacted with the Industrial Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance of 1958.

Table 5.1 Strike Activity 1949 - 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of strikes</th>
<th>Workers involved</th>
<th>Workdays lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>1,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>1,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,488</td>
<td>10,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,922</td>
<td>20,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,738</td>
<td>5,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4,692</td>
<td>12,017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although formed in 1948, the Fiji Mineworkers Union had not won recognition from the Emperor Gold Mines. Consequently, the employer did not deal with the predominantly-Fijian union. Instead, it dealt with a provincial committee of traditional leaders which had been
set up at the mines. The committee, Kevin Hince says, did not act as a
bargaining agent but served merely as a 'temuous link between
management and workers' (Hince 1971:374). So it is not surprising
that the company's position was always considerably stronger than that
of the union. For its part, the colonial state always supported the
company because of what it perceived as the company's vulnerability to
industrial disturbances. As late as 1953 it continued to turn its back on
the union (ibid.:375).

Consequently when the union struck in 1955, it meant business.
Wages had to be raised and recognition given. Over 10,000 workdays
were lost and the power of the union was amply demonstrated. But the
union's victory strengthened the resolve of mining capital and the state
to tighten the screws on labour. This was the first time that the gold
mine had suffered such a major loss and because it occurred when the
price of gold had fallen, the loss in revenue for both mining capital and
the colonial state was magnified further. Clearly labour had to be
restrained. This was underscored two years later when three strikes by
sugar workers produced a total loss of 21,000 workdays, more than
twice the loss resulting from the Vanuksoula stoppage.

The state moved quickly and in 1958 passed the Industrial Disputes
Ordinance. Unlike the earlier ordinance, that of 1958 did not provide
for a state-instituted conciliation machinery; instead it made recourse to
compulsory arbitration easier. Hence the time between a dispute and its
settlement was greatly reduced. But there was another major
innovation. The ordinance provided for boards of inquiry to investigate
the consequences of worker demands on the wider economy.
Alongside their own merits, worker demands had now to be assessed
in terms of the 'national interest', what the economy was capable of
withstanding. Inevitably union militancy was increasingly blamed for
inflation, unemployment, loss of revenue, and so on.

'National good' could be made to appear imbued with moral force,
a kind of unchallengeable morality which workers were impervious to
or simply unwilling to abide by. Either way, workers appeared the
villains. Such arguments had the added advantage of being buttressed
by legal sanction; now the law insisted that the wider economic
conditions of the country should not be put at risk.

The legislative changes of 1958, then, came about because of the
growing strength of the trade unions and their attempts to improve the
conditions of their members. But in 1959 and 1960 the ordinance
proved ineffective against two strikes which violently shook the very
roots of colonial capitalism in Fiji. We look at these strikes shortly but
first we must consider one further feature of the early years of the
labour movement — the ubiquitous problem of racialism.
Racialism in organised labour

For a long time, racialism militated against the unity and strength of the labour movement. The historical dialectic between race and class in the wider society found expression within the movement and produced scars and divisions which did not begin to heal until the late 1960s. Struggles within the movement during its infant stages mirrored and in turn accentuated the racial character of wider social tensions.

The history of racial fragmentation within the trade union movement dates back to the formation of the Fijian Teachers Association in 1934. But racial splits only began to afflict the nascent movement in a significant way in the immediate postwar years. Four reasons have been given for that. One is that there were skill differences which took the visible form of race (ibid.:376). For example, the Seamen's Union, registered in 1946, contained a specific racial exclusivity clause designed to exclude Europeans and part-Europeans who typically held higher rankings than Fijians. Those excluded responded by forming their own (shortlived) Masters, Mates and Engineers' Union. Skill differences were also instrumental in the formation of the Fiji Sugar Skilled Workers' Union (later reorganized as the Fiji Sugar Tradesmen's Union). Part-Europeans especially were heavily represented in it and their continued influence is suggested by the fact that as late as 1981 they still commanded the three top positions of president, vice-president and general secretary.

A second explanation has to do with employment patterns (ibid.:367-377. Also see Reddy 1974:150). Since Indians were concentrated most heavily in the sugar sector, they inevitably dominated both the membership and the leadership of unions such as the Chini Mazdur Sangh. The same was also true of the North Western Public Works Employees' Union, registered in 1947 and forerunner to the Fiji Public Works Department Employees' Union. Fijians, on the other hand, predominated in the Fiji Goldminers' Union and the Fiji Stevedores' Union. Through this early pattern of racial concentration, elements of racial competitiveness and exclusiveness increasingly crept into the movement in the 1950s and early 1960s. This was particularly true of the Fijian Commercial Workers' Union (formed in 1948), the Public Works Fijian Workers' Union (1953), the Fijian Domestic Restaurant and Allied Workers' Union (1960), the Suva and Lautoka Municipal Council (Fijian) Workers' Union (1960), the Fijian Engineering Workers' Union (1962), and the South Pacific Sugar Workers' Union (1962). Two significant points emerge from this: first, most of the racially exclusive unions were formed by Fijians; and secondly, many of the stronger and longer established unions were dominated by Indians. That situation 'led in some cases to a certain disenchantment of the Fijian minority based in part on language
barriers, accusations of favouritism and a feeling of inability to achieve primary Fijian goals' (ibid.:377).

Related to the sense of marginality, Reddy argued, is a third reason for racial exclusivity. Fijians were 'unwilling to accept non-Fijian leadership that lacked the authority and respect of the traditional chief' (Reddy 1974:151). His argument is a powerful one if the early experiences of the Fiji Miners' Union are anything to go by. As Hince (1971:375) has also argued, traditional authority continued for a long time to play a decisive role in that union and the evidence suggests that management exploited this state of affairs in order to undercut the growth and the influence of the union. Indeed it was not until after the 1955 strike that the union came into its own. While Reddy's argument has substance, the crucial point is not so much the absence of Fijian chiefly authority and leadership but simply the absence of Fijian as opposed to non-Fijian leadership.

A fourth explanation is the considerable pressure from the Fijian chiefs, colonial administrators and politicians to organize along racial lines. Chiefs feared a weakening of their authority and colonial administrators saw weak unionism as the corollary of racial division. With a racially fragmented trade union movement strikes would be less common, more easily broken and politically less dangerous (Reddy 1974:151-152).

Although these explanations are valid, they need to be understood in a broader historical context. Racial division in the organized labour movement was, first and foremost, a product of the way in which capitalist relations came to predominate in Fiji. Until the establishment of the sugar industry, the need for wage labour arose mainly in the copra and cotton plantations. There labour was predominantly Fijian, and hired primarily on a casual or part-time basis. With the onset of sugar production the working class assumed a particular racial character that subsequently served to keep it divided. The needs of sugar, plantation and mining capital, together with the changing pattern of labour availability at particular historical junctures, combined to produce occupational and geographical concentrations of labour along broadly racial lines. It is hardly surprising that labour organizations followed a similar pattern. This was enormously advantageous for capital simply because race threatened the unity of organized labour, as was instanced in the turbulent days of December 1959.

The 1959 strike is also indicative of another major development — the process of restructuring which permitted the development of tourism. It is significant that the 1959 strike involved oil workers; a tourist industry could not be viable if fuel supplies were threatened.
Workers united: the strike of ‘59

Despite the rising cost of living, oilworkers in Fiji received no wage increases between 1955 and 1959. In August 1959 the general secretary of the Wholesale and Retail Workers’ Union wrote to the Shell Oil Company and Vacuum Oil Company to ask for wage negotiations. The companies adopted delaying tactics and on 10 October the union filed a log of claims for improved working conditions and an increase in the minimum wage from £3.0.6d to £6 per week. The oil companies refused and made a counter offer of only £3.10.0 per week which the union rejected. Union attempts to keep negotiations open were met with company intransigence. Worker frustration and resentment grew and on 5 December the union gave notice that a nationwide strike would take effect two days later.

The strike lasted from 7 to 12 December and Suva was the main theatre for the drama. Early on the first day of the strike, an angry crowd of between 100 and 150 people tried to prevent the delivery of oil to the Electricity Power House in Suva. But union leaders, acting under the misapprehension that such action would contravene the Essential Services (Arbitration) Ordinance of 1954, allowed the delivery to proceed. The incident created considerable tension and by the end of the day the proclamation of emergency regulations under the Public Safety Ordinance of 1920 was considered.

On the next day tensions increased further as a result of a confrontation between picketers and riot police and a hostile statement by the colonial state. Released through the state-controlled Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC), the statement accused the union secretary, James Anthony, of flouting ‘recognised industrial practices’ and claimed that the union was behaving irresponsibly. The fact that the union had sought negotiations for a long time was totally ignored. So too was the extent to which union leaders had gone to abide by the law and to ensure that fuel supplies to essential services were not disrupted. Instead, the state declared that the strike should never have taken place, that workers should return to work and enter into negotiations, and that if negotiations were not successful then the assistance of the Labour Department should be sought.

On the next day union officials sought permission to have a statement of protest broadcast over the FBC but were refused. At the same time the oil companies began distributing fuel under police

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Beyond the Politics of Race

protection and the inevitable confrontations followed, beginning with one at Niranjan’s petrol station in Walu Bay and later at Burns Philp’s and Morris Hedstrom’s stations. As crowds grew, more police reinforcements arrived. Between 1 pm and 2 pm buses queued for petrol, and unrest and expressions of anti-European feeling became more frequent. Bus drivers were urged by the crowd to go on strike, more placards began to appear and the likelihood of violence increased.

Sometime in the afternoon the union secretary sent a telegram to the oil companies complaining that they wished to ‘crush the workers’ right to strike’. The companies, he felt, were using scab labour and supplying petrol for nonessential general use. By 3 pm a growing crowd at the bus station had become agitated and two incidents triggered off violence. A group crossed Rodwell Road and invaded Burns Philp’s store. At the other end of the bus station on Harris Street, Mr Patton of British Petroleum (South West Pacific) Limited, was stopped, abused with anti-European language, seized by the collar and compelled to get out of his car. Attention then turned to bus passengers and when a police party arrived, Mr Patton managed to get away and the crowd dispersed.

More was yet to come; by 4 pm the bus transport system broke down completely, James Anthony was refused permission to address a public meeting, more European and police vehicles were stoned, the FBC refused to broadcast a union statement of protest, and instructions were issued for the preparation of public safety regulations. A crowd of between 3,000 and 4,000 people gathered in an area opposite the Phoenix Theatre (known as the ‘hard standing’) expecting to hear James Anthony speak. In that highly-charged atmosphere, a squad of riot police arrived and called upon the crowd to disperse. Instead the crowd chanted, ‘We want a meeting’. In response tear smoke grenades were thrown into the crowd. Thereupon people scattered in all directions and retaliated with stones. A baton charge achieved little because by then most of the crowd had moved down Rodwell Road. Suva was about to witness a scale of destruction that would only be paralleled in the 1987 Coup. Leave for all regular members of the Fiji Military Forces was cancelled, the reservists in the Second Territorial Force Battalion were called to active duty, and a curfew was imposed.

Day 4 of the strike saw the promulgation of emergency regulations but they did not deter the strike leaders from calling a meeting of about 3,000 people ‘consisting almost entirely of Fijians and Indians’ at Albert Park just two hours later. Significantly, two leading chiefs, Ratu Edward Cakobau and Ratu George Cakobau, addressed the meeting and appealed for calm and reason. At a similar meeting next day union leaders asked the strikers to return to work and await the result of attempts which by then were being made to resume negotiations. Anthony had written to the Fiji Industrial Workers’ Congress asking
that it mediate in the dispute. At 1 pm on the following day he learned
that the Congress had agreed to mediate and that terms had already
been worked out for a return to work. Physical exhaustion had
compelled him to rest, and he was not present at the negotiations.
Consequently the ‘successful’ mediation of the dispute was brought
about largely through the efforts of two traditional chiefs, Ratu
Kamisese Mara and Ratu Meli Gonewai the president of the union.

Eventually the dispute was referred to arbitration and
representations made by Maurice Scott, advocate for Shell Oil
Company. Invoking the sentiments of the 1958 Industrial Disputes
Ordinance, he argued that due regard ought to be given to the
implications of wage demands for the wider economy. The oil
companies, he said, had not pleaded inability to pay. But they had to
keep in line with economic progress and the ability of other commercial
enterprises to pay. The union’s demands, he claimed, would mean the
‘complete collapse of industry in Fiji and therefore the ruination of the
country and its people’ (Fiji Times 28 January 1960). More
specifically, companies would either go out of business, cut down
staff, or resort to mechanization and thus reduce employment. With that
kind of threat, it is hardly surprising that union demands were not met.
It had asked for £6 per week, the companies were prepared to pay
£3.10.0 and the arbitral tribunal awarded £4.11.6. Because it fell
roughly halfway between the two positions, the award appeared fair.
But that fairness was more apparent than real; after all, the companies
had implicitly conceded that they could actually pay more.

Unlike the two major strikes which preceded it, the oilworkers’
strike did not involve workers drawn predominantly from one racial
group. The 1955 goldminers’ strike involved mainly Fijian workers
and the 1957 sugar millworkers’ strike mainly Indian workers. But
with the oilworkers’ strike, Fijian and Indian workers came together
for the first time in the country's history to fight a common cause. The
union leaders acknowledged that there were differences separating
Fijian and Indian workers but decided that because they shared
common ‘economic interests’ their differences ought to be ‘put into
cold storage’. Working class solidarity had for the first time
transcended racial boundaries and the ruling class was unable to play
upon racial sentiment in order to divide the workers.

Nevertheless, for the ruling class, the strike was seen in racial
terms:

There was a very pronounced anti-European feeling
throughout the disturbances....This manifested itself by anti-
European abuse hurled at Europeans and by the stoning of
European-driven cars....Both Fijians and Indians were
responsible....When rioting broke out the damage which was
caused to premises was confined entirely to European
premises and to offices such as the Labour Office and the District Government offices, both of which were then in charge of Europeans....The fact that the Police were Europeans also had an influence on the minds of those who were responsible for the show of anti-European feeling and it is important to remember that the oil Companies are European-owned and were...deliberately chosen for strike action (Lowe Report:27-28).

Charles Stinson, whose store was also damaged, agreed: the destruction was 'centred near all European businesses'. He then listed various establishments which had been attacked — Carpenters, Burns Philp, Mouat's Pharmacy, Corbett's Butchery, Boots the Chemist, Steeles, the British Council, Fiji Trading Company and Morris Hedstrom. About 86 per cent of the damage caused by the strike was inflicted on 'European' property.

The commission of inquiry which investigated the strike gave this explanation for the destruction:

The evidence suggests that the anti-European feeling was probably engendered by the fact that the Europeans own the largest shops and have, at least, an appearance of wealth and that the lower paid workers felt that such large shops were indicative of considerable profits whereas many workers' wages were low (ibid.:28).

The tentative and qualified nature of this explanation is understandable. After all, the commissioner could hardly be expected to say directly that capitalist exploitation was the root cause of the strike. But at least he was prepared to concede that the workers' anger had something to do with disparities in wealth. The real target was not Europeans as such but capitalists. In this case, it just so happened that the dispute was with European capitalists. Moreover, workers did recognize that the real enemy was capitalism because Indian and Chinese businesses were also attacked (ibid.: appendix IX). Significantly, establishments of the colonial state suffered damage too. The strikers were not fools. They knew whose side the state was on.

The strike of '59, then, was a major convulsion. Never before had workers ignored their racial differences and come together on such a scale to shake the capitalist system to its very roots. Here was organized working class pressure in its most developed form to date and the ruling class knew it. The readiness with which it resorted to violence to suppress the strike showed very clearly that it was simply not prepared to tolerate threats against capitalist interests and, more particularly, the newly-laid foundations of the neocolonial economy. Had the strike been allowed to succeed, then workers might have taken
heart and mounted similar strikes in the future which would seriously undermine the development of the industry which was to be the other major prop of the neocolonial economy — the tourist industry. Having successfully suppressed the strike, the task now was to ensure that it did not reoccur. But before that process of legislative and institutional containment could begin, another strike threatened the capitalist-dominated economy — the cane farmers’ strike of 1960.

Convulsion in the cane fields

The sugar industry expanded greatly in the 1950s and by the time its ten-year cane agreement came up for renegotiation the CSR was concerned about overproduction and sought to restrict output. Two possibilities were suggested: either a tonnage quota could be imposed on each farm or quotas could be introduced on an acreage basis whereby the CSR would buy cane grown only on defined areas. Both proposals were rejected by the farmers, who argued that the CSR had a moral obligation to buy all cane because it had urged farmers since 1957 to increase the cane acreage (Moynagh 1981:205). The CSR also proposed cost-cutting measures, including the suggestion that the growers’ share of sugar proceeds be reduced when sugar prices were high. Needless to say, these were also rejected by the farmers.

After protracted negotiations, the colonial state collaborated with the CSR in March 1960. ‘It is gratifying’, the company recorded, ‘that our views on the situation and method of handling it seem to be finding acceptance by Government’ (quoted in ibid.).

The farmers tried to present a united front by bringing farmer organizations under one umbrella, a Federation of Canegrowers. But the old rivalries stretching back to the 1930s persisted. Always more moderate than the Maha Sangh, the Kisan Sangh was amenable to compromise. Hence the farmer unity which many were so keen to achieve again proved elusive. The catalyst for the final break came in May 1960.

Until then the Federation had remained firm and united in its demands: that the company take all of the 1960 harvest, that a new pricing formula be worked out which would split the net sugar proceeds between the farmers and the company on a 70/30 basis, and that the pricing formula be included in a renegotiated, long-term contract. But in May the governor proposed an economic investigation into the sugar industry. The farmers rejected the suggestion and A.D. Patel in particular expressed grave misgivings. An inquiry would only delay matters and weaken the farmers’ bargaining position. He remembered precisely the same situation during the 1943 strike and was anxious to avoid a repetition. Farmers were now highly suspicious of the governor.
On 27 June three local members of the Executive Council, Ratu Mara, A. Deoki and J.N. Falvey, met the governor who advised them to encourage the growers’ representatives to accept a commission of inquiry. To Patel such political meddling threatened to turn local opinion against the farmers. A commission of inquiry would be presented to the public as a reasonable course of action and if the farmers rejected it, they would be seen to be unreasonable. A month later the Kisan Sangh broke away from the Federation and together with three Fijian canegrowers’ associations — the Nadroga, Ra and Ba Fijian Canegrowers’ Associations — accepted an interim agreement with the CSR. J.N. Falvey had acted as adviser to the Fijian associations. The agreement required the CSR to take 199,000 tons of the 1960 crop and stipulated that crushing should stop once the figure had been reached. A deduction of eighteen pence per ton for burnt cane was also incorporated, the intention being that these funds be used to reimburse the farmers worst affected by strike action. For those who remained in the Federation, the agreement represented a complete betrayal and they would have no part of it. They decided to fight alone.\(^2\)

On 4 August four cane farms in Ba were burned, and with rumours of intimidation gaining currency, the repressive forces of the state were mobilized. The Public Safety Regulations which had been passed during the oilworkers’ strike were still in force and on 9 August a proclamation calling out the whole of the Territorial Force was signed by the governor. Police reinforcements were sent to the sugar regions, including Labasa where crushing was due to commence on 11 August. In the meantime, the strike began to exact a heavy economic toll. Shop sales had fallen off since June. Now the retail trade worsened and a growing incidence of petty theft of food and other items was reported.

By the end of August reports of cane burning and threats of violence increased considerably and through the pages of the Fiji Times the representatives of the ruling class urged the colonial state to take stronger action against the ‘disruptive forces’ in order to end the strike. Soon afterwards an official statement noted the gravity of the situation and the deterioration in race relations. An expansion of the Special Constabulary was also announced. However it was not enough for the ruling class. The Fiji Times called for firm and decisive action, and when the Fijian Ex-Servicemen announced their readiness to prove their loyalty by helping to preserve law and order, the national daily heaped praise on them.

On 4 September about 9,000 farmers gathered in Ba and were addressed by, among others, A.D.Patel, S.M.Koya, James Anthony

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2 The following account of the 1960 canefarmers’ strike is drawn largely from reports in the Fiji Times.
and Mohammed Tora. A resolution was passed giving the governor three days in which to review two proposals which had been submitted to him earlier. The first was that the farmers who had not agreed to the July 24 agreement would sell their cane to the government; the second was that the governor should decide on the percentage of cane to be harvested by those farmers on an area basis. The second proposal also carried the proviso that the allocation for each farm should be determined on an equitable basis between farmers but bearing in mind also that no farmer’s allotted area of cane should be left unharvested. However both proposals were rejected, the first for ‘legal and other reasons’ and the second simply because it was unacceptable.

The Ba ‘ultimatum’, as the Fiji Times called it, also carried the rider that if the governor did not respond to their requests, farmers would burn their cane. The governor first responded by amending the Public Safety Regulations and extending the powers of the commissioner of police. He also drew the public’s attention to the law relating to setting fire to land and on national radio appealed to farmers to stop burning cane. At the same time, it was reported that the governor had signalled the British Far East Army Headquarters in Singapore for troops to deal with the strike. The report was not without foundation, as the following official response to it suggests:

There has never been any question of seeking outside assistance until all local resources were fully utilised, but as a precautionary measure it had to be considered whether any additional assistance could conceivably become necessary (Fiji Times 20 September 1960).

By the end of the first week of September some 21,733 tons of cane had been burned, a little more than half being on CSR estates. A week later another 1,631 tons were burned. Tensions rose higher and parallels were soon drawn with the 1943 strike, then labelled a ‘stab in the back’. When B.D. Lakshman moved in the Legislative Council that a sugar board be established to control the sale and purchase of cane, and also that there be an inquiry into the sugar industry, opponents of the strike launched a blistering attack on A.D. Patel. J.N. Falvey praised the Fijian farmers and blasted Patel for his ‘outrageous personal vanity’ and claimed that a very serious rift between the Fijian and Indian communities had arisen because of the crisis.

Essentially, Falvey was trying to personalize the whole dispute and at the same time make it appear racial. History was repeating itself and to reinforce the myth others also condemned the strike’s racial character. Vijay Singh, a representative of the Kisan Sangh, announced that the Indian community was now ‘bitterly divided as never before’ and claimed that A.D. Patel was responsible. Ratu Penaia Ganilau made a statement representative of elite Fijian opinion:
At the three provincial councils I attended [in July] it was quite clear that members were very concerned about the effect of the dispute on the economy of the Colony. As a result they passed resolutions offering their services to the Government. Fijians have since come out in hundreds. About 1,000 are now harvesting cane in the Western District. Members of the RSSA [Returned Servicemen's Association]...came out in thousands. When I was in the Western District this week I was told that one of the non-cane-cutting leaders had said that for every thousand the RSSA put up he could put up 5,000 cane farmers. That, I thought, was fighting talk (Fiji Times 1 October 1960).

Here was a marshalling of forces which Patel's group was unable to deal with and inevitably the strikers had to succumb. In October Julian Amery — the secretary of state for the colonies — arrived. He met Patel and his associates, urged that harvesting be resumed 'for the good of the Colony', and advised that they present their case to the commission of inquiry which would be set up. The farmers agreed and the strike ended.

It has been alleged that Patel's attitude to the strike stemmed from his eagerness as a Gujerati to prolong the dispute so as to increase farmer indebtedness to Gujerati shopkeepers. It has also been argued that by adopting a militant posture he expected to increase his popular support and thereby help his political career (Moynagh 1981:206). Moynagh argues, however, that both of these suggestions lack credibility (ibid.). And he may well be right. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that pressures from the Indian bourgeoisie, to which he belonged, coupled with his unquestionable political ambition, never at any stage informed his calculations. Be that as it may, the main reason for ending the strike was simply the realization by Patel and his followers that the balance of forces was stacked against them. To have prolonged the strike further would have meant more hardship for the striking farmers whose chances of success were minimal. Six months of struggle against awesome odds had taken a heavy toll. Now they looked forward with anticipation to the findings of the commission of inquiry headed by Sir Malcolm Trustam Eve. But from the lessons of their history they should have expected disappointment.

The Eve Report was a major victory for the CSR. It established a method of production control which was acceptable to the CSR, it provided for the establishment of an administrative machinery to oversee the industry — an independent chairman, the Sugar Board and the Sugar Advisory Council, and it decided on a sugar proceeds-sharing formula which 'gave CSR some protection against rising costs [but] provided no such protection for the growers' (ibid.:216. Also see
Narsey 1979:113-114, 117-118). All in all, the enquiry was an astute political exercise, for under the guise of impartiality, it was 'distinctly favourable to the company' (Moynagh 1981:216). The farmers who toiled and laboured lost out again.

True to form, the Fiji Times praised the report's 'dispassionate impartiality' and pointed to 'its value as an important contribution to the wellbeing of the Colony'. It applauded the state's intention to implement Eve's recommendations and stressed that this was the 'time for action':

The sugar industry, and the whole Colony, is waiting for the Government to create the machinery of administration and control which the Commission has recommended as a basis for peace and progress...A repetition of the selfish, irresponsible, destructive antics shown in the past will bring disaster (Fiji Times 26 October 1961).

In the following December the Sugar Industry Ordinance of 1961 was passed. It provided for a Sugar Board consisting of an independent chairman, vice-chairman and accountant. All three were also to be members of the Sugar Advisory Council along with representatives of government, the CSR and the growers.

As a mechanism of control, the ordinance was highly effective. In addition to giving extensive powers to the independent chairman, it also excluded lawyers and politicians from the Advisory Council, in other words people like A.D.Patel and S.M.Koya. Also, the range of possible offenders under the provisions of the Ordinance became extremely wide. According to Section 13(1):

any person who, before the Independent Chairman has given notice of the issue of a Certificate regarding a dispute, does any act or makes an omission the doing or omission of which hinders or is calculated to hinder orderly planting or growing or harvesting or cane, transport of cane to a mill, crushing the cane, making sugar at a mill, or transporting or storing of sugar, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

This provision was certainly effective in restraining farmer activities. Not until 1977 did it need to be invoked in a court case — against Mohammed (now Apisai) Tora. The same was true of the ordinance as a whole, and it was not until 1987, in the aftermath of the coup, that the sugar industry again faced anything like the crisis of 1960. Nevertheless the boom of the 1960s owed much to the containment of workers outside the sugar sector. In the aftermath of the oilworkers strike of 1959, there followed also a programme of legislative and institutional control. This culminated in the formation of the Tripartite
Forum in 1976, in which labour was co-opted into a formal and restraining arrangement with capital and the state. For this to be possible, however, organized labour had first to be won over to the ideology of 'joint consultation'. That was the colonial state’s next task.

**Ideology of consultation: towards containment by co-option**

Two months after the oilworkers' strike, the Burns Commission submitted its report. It accepted that there was a need for the condition of wage earners to be 'substantially improved' but claimed to have found no evidence that such could be achieved through a redistribution of income. Moreover, it said that there was 'little evidence that deliberate exploitation by employers [was] the order of the day'. For workers, therefore, the way forward lay in 'responsible' trade unionism. Three months later, in May 1960, the deputy labour adviser to the secretary of state for the colonies visited the country and gave his blessing to the commission's recommendations. But by then the trade union movement had split racially.

In March, Ratu Meli Gonewai broke away from the Wholesale and Retail Workers Union and formed the Fiji Oil Workers Union. In the same month George Suguturaga led a breakaway from the Fiji Municipal Workers' Union, called the Municipal Native Workers' Union, and open only to Fijians, part-Fijians and Pacific Islanders.

Suguturaga was also instrumental in forming a Fijian Docks Construction Union from the Building Workers' Union. Two other Fijian unions were created in 1960: the Fijian Domestic Restaurant and Allied Workers' Union and the Fijian Engineering Workers' Union.

Secessionism clearly undermined the unity of the trade union movement and was roundly condemned by established unions. Employers were accused of having 'fostered and encouraged' the racial splits and workers were urged to refrain from becoming 'tools of the employers' (*Fiji Times* 23 April 1960). The colonial state was deliberately 'noncommittal'. The governor told a trade union delegation that splits could and would occur if union leaders did not behave 'responsibly'. Only in August 1962 did the state modify its position, and declared that breakaway unions were 'in principle' undesirable. Its change did not imply sympathy for trade unions. Instead it reflected a new and less objectionable form of labour control, 'joint consultation'.

The architect of the new approach was John Amputch. A Fiji-born Catholic Indian, Amputch became the first local commissioner of labour in April 1960, the very moment when the unity of the trade union movement was undermined by racial splits led by Fijians. His background is significant. Beginning his career as an apprentice with the CSR in 1927, he later joined Morris Hedstrom Limited. Working
his way up the retail firm, he acted as Vacuum Oil Company's representative in northwest Viti Levu and later became Morris Hedstrom's branch manager for Nadi and Tavua. In 1944 he joined the colonial civil service as a labour officer. In 1952 he was seconded to the Labour Department in Trinidad for six months and in the following year went to England for a Colonial Office training course for labour officers. Before his appointment as labour commissioner, he twice acted in that capacity. With that kind of background, it could hardly be expected that his attitude towards trade unions would be anything more than a moderate one.

In May 1960, A. Deoki raised the matter of breakaway unions in the Legislative Council. He accused the colonial state of encouraging union splits, continuing to pursue a policy of divide and rule, and of assisting big business not workers. Characteristically he was rebuked for his 'wild and mischievous' allegations. Ratu Mara described his speech as 'rather provocative' and Ravuama Vunivalu and Semesa Sikivou were also antagonistic. But the whole matter was out in the open. Deoki had pointed to the weakening of organized labour and state collusion in the affair.

Yet Deoki's analysis was that of an Indian, a Christian, a lawyer and respected member of the community. This was not a trade unionist talking, much less a communist. It is difficult to imagine that his condemnation of the exclusion of Indians from the breakaway unions did not have any impact on Amputch, the newly-appointed labour commissioner, who was himself an Indian and a Christian. Could he afford to be seen to associate with a development which, on the one hand, so openly discriminated against workers of his own race and, on the other, neatly served the interests of capital? Tactfully he responded by seeking out a middle position by postponing decisive action until conditions were propitious.

By June such conditions began to emerge. Mr E. Parry, the visiting deputy labour adviser from London criticized union splits. In a speech to the British Council Youth Club and the Viti Club, he said that he had seen more breakaway unions in Fiji than in any other place. Significantly, he explicitly extolled the virtues of closer relations between labour and capital as a basis for sound industrial relations policy (Fiji Times 6 June 1960). It is highly probable that Amputch already thought along these lines. But since the case was now being publicly made by a senior British official, Amputch was now presented with a way out of his dilemma. If an institutional arrangement could be devised which brought representatives of labour and capital closer together, then the anti-Indian tendency within the trade union movement might be contained, or at the very least blunted. Moreover, such an arrangement would not fundamentally complicate the task of defending the interests of capital.
To realize this most attractive option, there had to be a demonstrable willingness on the part of both labour and capital to be party to the arrangement and more importantly to make it work. Also, there had to be umbrella organizations on each side from which representatives could be drawn. The Fiji Trade Union Congress was already in existence but no equivalent organization for capital existed.

After the traumatic events of December 1959, capital did not stand idly by. Developments in the early months of 1960 were watched very closely. By the end of May, one half of all the strikes for the whole year had already occurred and capital saw the need to take defensive measures. Furthermore, the opportune moment for decisive action was fast approaching: splits were reappearing among the canefarmers and the unity of the trade union movement was under threat. So with organized labour in relative disarray, the time was ripe for a marshalling of forces. On 14 June 1960 the Fiji Employers Consultative Association (FECA) was formed. Against a labour movement plagued with division, capital now stood united and confident, and from the list of foundation members it is clear that the association was dominated by foreign-owned companies.3

With the FECA now in place, the way was clear to implement the ideology of ‘joint consultation’. In October, Amputch told the Suva Rotary Club that joint consultation between management and staff was essential: ‘In all fields of life, it is necessary for people to understand each other. This applies to racial well-being as well as to industry’ (Fiji Times 21 October 1960). In trying to sell the new approach to industrial relations, the commissioner of labour also tried to heal the racial rifts within the trade union movement.

With the ideology of joint consultation now broached, capital moved to reinforce it. In December, J. Grundy, the director of the FECA, advised capital of its obligations:

3 Fiji Times and Herald; Colonial Sugar Refining Company; Emperor Gold Mining Company; W.R. Carpenter and Company; Burns Philp (South Seas) Company; Morris Hedstrom Limited; Carlton Brewery (Fiji) Limited; Millers Limited; Qantas Airways Limited; Carreras Limited; Unions Soaps Pty Limited; Pacific Biscuit Company; Suva Motors Limited; Island Industries Limited; Pacific Shipowners Limited; Fiji Airways Limited; Fiji Pastoral Company Limited; Fiji Tobacco Company; G.B. Hari and Company; Joong Hing Loong Company, and Roadbuilder Limited. (Source: Kuruduadua, The Fiji Employers Consultative Association, p.15.)
Failure of the employers to form and join employers associations, particularly in a territory such as Fiji where there is a developing political consciousness, is obstructive and selfish. If they do not do so the Government is hindered in the framing of its labour legislation, industrial relations are impaired, and in the long run a state of imbalance will be created. This would be detrimental not only to the employers, but to the workers and the general economy of the country (*Fiji Times* 17 December 1960).

As more and more employers heeded his advice, the membership of the FECA grew. The successful marshalling of capitalist forces meant even more concerted effort to put the ideology of joint consultation into practice. Capital and the colonial state now hammered home the message ‘consultation, not confrontation’, and the success of the exercise became evident fairly quickly. Just one year after the turbulence of 1959/60, the level of strike activity fell sharply and stayed relatively low for the rest of the decade. There were strikes but they did not match the magnitude nor the intensity of the turbulent struggles of 1959 and 1960.

The difference is not altogether unexpected because the turmoil at the beginning of the decade threatened to undermine the process of restructuring which began fifteen years earlier and which laid the foundations of the neocolonial economy. By the late 1950s, the way had been cleared for tourism and the ruling class was determined that the country’s new direction would not be undermined by the increasingly assertive working classes. The suppression of the oilworkers in 1959 and the farmers in 1960 testified to that resolve. But violence is costly and the ruling class subsequently turned to the policy of containment by consultation and co-optation. With the neocolonial economy saved from the union challenge, the ruling class looked forward to reaping the benefits of its strategy in the boom of the 1960s.
PART III:

CONTRADICTION AND CRISIS IN NEOCOLONIAL FIJI 1960-1989
Chapter 6

Capitalist Consolidation, Racial Tension and Decolonization

In the first decade of the neocolonial economy, the basic structure of class exploitation remained the same. Sugar capital gained from the Eve Commission, the repressive 1961 Sugar Act ensured control of the producers, and sugar remained the main agricultural crop. But in the non-sugar sector, as we shall see, attempts were made at diversification. More importantly, in terms of the class struggle, there were attempts to draw more Fijians into capitalist agriculture, particularly through agricultural settlement schemes. The failure of those attempts, coupled with the continuing lack of Fijian success in commerce and industry, particular in tourism and related areas, produced a wave of Fijian discontent about their economic 'backwardness' generally and the failure of Fijian businesses in particular. Indigenous agitation for greater involvement in business therefore grew but by the end of the 1960s had still to produce results.

The reasons lay in the historically-evolved, subordinate integration of Fijians into the capitalist-dominated, externally-oriented economy. The largest section of the Fijian population, the peasants, remained confined mainly to productive activity geared towards subsistence needs and traditional obligations. A much smaller group had taken jobs as blue or white collar workers and an even smaller group, consisting mainly of chiefs, had emerged as a Fijian bureaucratic bourgeois class within the colonial state. But a Fijian capitalist class was non-existent.

The strongest fractions of the bourgeoisie in Fiji still comprised foreign sugar, commercial and financial capital — the CSR, Morris Hedstrom Limited (later taken over by the Carpenters Group), Burns Philp Limited, Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Company, Bank of New Zealand, Australia and New Zealand Bank, and Bank of New South Wales (later Westpac Banking Corporation). The local fractions, mainly European and Indian, were concentrated in the professions, secondary industry, hotelling, the wholesale and retail trade, transportation and, finally, in agriculture as large farm or plantation owners. Indian peasant farmers of course produced most of the sugar and most of the local rice, as well as cash crops for local markets. Apart from areas like mining and stevedoring, Indians made up the bulk of the small but growing industrial working class. They also
predominated in white collar jobs, particularly in the civil service, and in the professions, especially teaching, medicine and law.

By 1960 the process of economic restructuring which began some fifteen years earlier was virtually complete and the tourist boom which lay ahead would soon give shape to the structure of the neocolonial economy. The former prominence of the primary sector would decrease as tourism touched off a major expansion of the secondary and tertiary sectors. The major beneficiaries of that growth would be foreign capital and to a lesser extent the local bourgeoisie, the most visible of whom were the Indians simply because of their numbers. As more and more Indian businesses sprung up, the mistaken impression of Indian economic domination was reinforced, an impression which was, and remains, strong among Fijians. But there were other grounds for maintaining that view. In most professions and trades, in the civil service, and in the mid upper levels of the private sector, Indian representation and performance was generally superior to that of Fijians. The same also applied to academic performance.

Taken in the context of a long colonial history of racist, and in particular anti-Indian, ideology and practice, this virtually ensured that Fijians' perceptions about their conditions and aspirations would be based largely on comparisons with 'Indian' achievement and success. It is clear, however, that the real yardstick against which Fijians measured their disadvantage was not 'Indian' success but bourgeois Indian success. They looked with envy not at Indian canefarmers, ricegrowers, labourers and junior clerks but at Indian wholesalers and retailers, manufacturers and industrialists, builders and constructors, financiers, transport operators, accountants, lawyers, engineers, scientists, senior civil servants and so on. However, the predominance of race over class at the level of everyday life ensured that Indian class differences mattered less than the fact that Indians were Indians.

Our argument, therefore, is that the struggle for 'Fijian' advancement which emerged in the 1960s had to do primarily with Fijian anger at their underrepresentation in the bourgeois class. Most of all, it stemmed from Fijian concern at the absence of an indigenous bourgeoisie. That, fundamentally, is what the cry for Fijian 'economic'  advancement was all about. In this chapter we develop this theme, noting that with a rapidly growing neocolonial economy there was little chance of a Fijian capitalist class emerging. We also note how, from the mid 1960s onwards, the Fijian struggle changed tack when Fijians realized that in political power they possessed a potentially more effective means by which to constitute their own bourgeoisie. Initially reluctant to accept independence from Britain, Fijian leaders changed their tune once it became evident that independence was firmly on the agenda. A Fijian bourgeoisie would be more likely to develop with Fijian state power.
Fijian economic aspirations in the 1960s were linked closely to developments in the national economy, particularly in the tourist industry; both were in turn intimately linked to developments in labour relations. We begin therefore with an overview of the first decade of Fiji’s neocolonial economy.

Class containment and economic growth

Early progress in the development of joint consultation was hindered to a degree because recognition of trade unions was not compulsory. In 1961 the state tried to persuade companies to recognize trade unions, arguing that recognition was ‘fundamental both to enable trade unions to perform their functions effectively and for collective bargaining to begin’ (Annual Report of the Department of Labour 1961:7). But capital, now better organized, was in a strong position to resist, which it did. Moreover, the trade union movement was divided and unable to exert pressure on capital. Without compulsory recognition, labour remained at a disadvantage and that disadvantage persisted until 1976 when a Trade Union Recognition Act was finally conceded.

In the meantime, the legislative screws on the trade union movement were tightened. Three important pieces of industrial legislation were passed in 1964. The Trade Union Ordinance, which replaced the Industrial Association Ordinance of 1942, imposed new controls on trade unions. Section 31, for example, provided new conditions of eligibility for executive officers in trade unions. These had to do with criminal records, literacy standards and length of service in the trade or occupation concerned, and confined holding executive office to only one union.

Further controls were imposed under the Trade Disputes (Arbitration, Inquiry and Settlement) Ordinance. For example, whereas twenty-one days advance notice had to be given in respect of strikes affecting essential services, now twenty-eight days advance notice was required. Also, the new disputes legislation now relied ‘for its efficacy’ on ‘punishment for breach of contract’ (Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labour 1964:12). The third piece of new legislation was the Employment Ordinance which established the Labour Advisory Board, which was representative of capital, labour and the state. Its duty was to advise the state on ‘matters connected with employment and labour’ and also on ‘any questions referred to it by the Minister of Labour’. A Labour Advisory Board had been in existence since 1947 but not until now was the agency formally constituted as an established part of the state’s industrial relations machinery (Kangwai n.d.:4).

With these legislative and institutional arrangements in place, the state could give greater practical effect to its new ideology of joint consultation. Industrial relations would now hinge on ‘co-operation’
and ‘responsible trade unionism’, not ‘confrontation’ and ‘militancy’. It could hardly have been otherwise. Labour had been beaten into submission after the upheavals of 1959 and 1960, racial divisions within the trade union movement had undermined labour unity, and the new labour laws of 1964 strapped the workers into yet another straitjacket. Physical repression, racial unionism and ideological softening paved the way for co-optation. With organized labour successfully roped into formal arrangements biased in favour of capital, the management of industrial relations became easier. Class containment had become easier. Class relations were now more formalized, more institutionalized, more routinized. Therein lie the immediate origins of tripartism in Fiji, a development which culminated in the formation of the Tripartite Forum in 1976. It is not surprising that industrial strife in the 1960s did not approach the level nor the intensity of upheavals at the beginning of the decade (see Table 6.1).

### Table 6.1 Strike Activity 1960-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Strikes</th>
<th>Workers involved</th>
<th>Workdays Lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4,692</td>
<td>12,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,319</td>
<td>4,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,531</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>194</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>101</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,421</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2,438</td>
<td>4,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>4,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>752</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Against the general pattern of industrial calm in the 1960s, the levels of strike activity in 1967 and 1968 stand out as significant exceptions. Their origins lay in the provision of more fiscal incentives for the tourist industry under the 1964 Hotels Aid Ordinance. Within a year the tourist boom was underway. Not unexpectedly, workers in the industry agitated for better wages and conditions.
The dismissal of three workers at the Korolevu Beach Hotel in 1965 provoked a strike in support of demands for recognition and improved conditions of work. The company refused, the workers walked off their jobs and were subsequently sacked. Soon afterwards twenty-seven luxury units at the hotel were burned. A strike affecting workers at the Skylodge and Mocambo hotels later that year was followed in 1966 by a strike by airport workers. The hidden contradictions of the growing tourist industry were beginning to surface.

When the Airport, Hotel and Catering Workers struck against Qantas Airways in 1967 and 1968, the very existence of the tourist industry seemed to be threatened. Consequently the reaction against the strikers was much stronger than previously. The union and its president, Apisai Tora, were roundly slammed by Qantas, hotel groups, the Fiji Visitors' Bureau and the colonial state alike (Fiji Times 6 April 1968; Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour 1968:9), and the Ministry of Labour described the outcome of the 1968 dispute in this way:

It is interesting and perhaps salutary to note that the disruptive tactics employed by the union in pursuit of its unrealistic claims achieved no more for its members, and in some cases even less, that the more moderate policy and the use of collective bargaining procedures adopted by the majority of the other unions (ibid.).

Here was a subtle warning to workers generally, and to those in the tourist industry in particular, of the need for a 'co-operative' and 'responsible' attitude. Any threat to the industry would not be treated lightly. The boom in international capitalism, and the resulting sharp increase in international tourism, was benefitting the Fiji economy. Capital and the colonial state were both adamant that its spin-offs should not be jeopardized by workers. Claims for better wages and working conditions were fine so long as they were 'realistic'.

Despite the hiccups of 1967 and 1968, the containment of labour in the 1960s was generally successful and a relatively stable industrial environment contributed to the rapid economic growth. Between 1963 and 1969, the Gross Domestic Product rose from $94 million to $141 million; annual growth rates leapt from 4.1 per cent to 8.4 per cent. Much of this growth was due to the massive increase in tourism which quickly rivalled sugar as a major earner of foreign revenue. In 1963 sugar accounted for 60 per cent of gross foreign exchange while tourism accounted for a mere 7.5 per cent. By 1969 those figures had changed to 38 per cent and 27.9 per cent respectively and they remained around these levels into the 1980s.
Table 6.2 Gross Foreign Exchange Earnings from Sugar and Tourism for Selected Years 1963 to 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total All Exports Plus Tourism ($mil)</th>
<th>Sugar as % of Total</th>
<th>Tourism as % of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>102.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>32.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>211.2</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>252.5</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>427.6</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


By the 1970s the precise nature of the neocolonial economy had become clearer. Proportionately, the size of the primary sector shrank, whereas the distribution and several related sectors grew and the state sector expanded greatly. This pattern would remain fairly constant thereafter, establishing the hallmark of the neocolonial economy. Much was said about the need for diversification and indeed attempts were made to diversify but so far they have failed, at least in terms of productive activity. For as Table 6.3 shows, it is the financial and state sectors which have recorded the largest growth.

Beneath the economic bouyancy of the 1960s, hidden pressures built up. The external orientation of the economy was worsened by a burgeoning tourist industry which relied heavily on imports. Consequently a trade surplus of nearly $4 million soon turned into an evergrowing deficit which rose from $3 million in 1964 to $28 million in 1970. (By 1980 it stood at $153 million, and in 1985 $237 million.)

---

Table 6.3 Sectoral Composition of GDP for Selected Years 1963-1984 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry, fishing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and construction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining, quarrying, electricity gas and water</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and communication</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution (incl. tourism)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance and insurance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and other services</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100 100 100 100 100 100


The high cost of imports contributed to rising inflation. Alarmed, the state commissioned an investigation into the upward price trend in 1964. The Turner Report’s recommendation of a prices and incomes policy was not implemented, with the result that the inflationary spiral, after a temporary lull, picked up again. By the end of the decade inflationary pressures refuelled class tensions, and even the relatively docile trade union movement became increasingly agitated. The number of strikes rose from a low of 2 in 1966 to 12 in 1967, 17 in 1968 and peaked at 27 in 1969.

However, with the prospect of independence being achieved in 1970, workers rallied behind the call for cooperation and nation-building and the number of strikes fell to 8. Once the euphoria of October 1970 passed, the underlying class tensions soon resurfaced and forced the six-month old Fijian-dominated postcolonial state to introduce price controls in April 1971. The intensifying contradictions of the first decade of neocolonial Fiji were about to burst forth.
Fijian discontent: aspirations and disadvantage

Having sketched the broad outlines of the structure and underlying class tensions of the neocolonial economy, we are now better placed for a clearer understanding of the origins and persistence of the cry 'Fiji for the Fijians'.

'Fijian economic backwardness' has usually been explained in terms of such factors as 'subsistence affluence', preference for the 'leisurely' village lifestyle, lack of entrepreneurship and capitalist discipline, the persistence of communalistic as opposed to individualistic values, pressures from traditional obligations, and academic underachievement. While these factors cannot be dismissed, they need to be understood in the context of a deeper structural cause, the form of Fijian incorporation into the capitalist-dominated economy. There is, however, one other particular factor which is often mentioned and which requires scrutiny: lack of capital. This has always been a major obstacle to Fijian economic advancement and the record of state assistance is itself telling.

We have already commented on the 1948 reorganization of the Fijian administration, and in particular the formation of the Fijian Affairs Board. Reorganization ensured the survival of the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie, and strengthened its position within the ruling class. The power base of this chief-dominated bureaucratic bourgeoisie was of course the predominantly-peasant Fijian population whose persistent economic disadvantage had to be addressed if its continuing loyalty was to be maintained. In other words, the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie had to use the greater autonomy and resources now available to it to alleviate the economic condition of the Fijian labouring classes.

To some extent such a strategy necessitated the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie sacrificing at least some of its class interests, unless of course the Fijian administration could be presented as an institution working for the advancement of the Fijian 'people' rather than for the enhancement of the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie's class interests. The charade worked but with the obvious result that its economic experiments to rectify the economic disadvantage of the Fijian masses failed.

In 1956 W.G. Johnson, a local European member of the Legislative Council, proposed an agricultural resettlement scheme for Fijians in which individual farmers would be given long-term leases of native land, a loan, and agricultural advice. Three years later, his suggestion was commended highly by Oskar Spate who had been commissioned to investigate the 'economic problems and prospects of the Fijian people'. Among its advantages, Spate claimed, was the strengthening of 'individual independence' and, more importantly, 'a
withering away of the communal system’ (Spate 1959:21). He believed the root causes of Fijian economic backwardness lay with the communal system and the Fijian Administration, both having been ‘designed for non-economic ends’ (ibid.:5). As he put it:

Any system which bases itself primarily on the maintenance of the traditional structure must...reconcile itself to seeing much of its economic effort stranded on the reefs of hierarchy and particularism (ibid.:7).

At the same time the Burns Commission was ‘enquiring into the natural resources and population of the colony’, and its 1960 report blamed the colonial state for the Fijian economic problem:

We do not blame the Fijians for this so much as the Government and the Legislature for so long adopting a paternalistic attitude and for still giving high priority to fostering, at this period of the 20th century, ‘the continuance of the Fijian communal system and the customs and observances traditionally associated with that system (Burns et al. 1960:38).

The Commission had no doubts about what should happen to the Fijian Administration:

[It is] an unnecessary expense which Fiji cannot afford. In a colony of this size a double administration is wasteful of manpower...We [are] definitely of the opinion that the Fijian Administration should not continue for any longer than is absolutely necessary (ibid.:31).

Not surprisingly the Commission’s recommendation for the gradual abolition of the Fijian administration was rejected by the Council of Chiefs but its suggestion that the initiative for improving the Fijian economic condition should come from the colonial state won official approval. Before considering its specific proposals, let us briefly consider another very significant proposition put forward by the Commission.

It argued that there was little point in trying to get Fijians involved in industry because they lacked ‘entrepreneurship’ and, very significantly, capital. We would agree that most Fijians lacked capitalist entrepreneurship but that is perfectly understandable, given the nature of their integration into the capitalist-dominated economy. Much the same can be said about the Fijian lack of capital. How could they acquire capital when they were denied access to capital-accumulating opportunities? Furthermore, as Table 6.4 indicates, the very colonial state that was supposed to advance Fijians economically in fact pursued
financial lending policies which benefitted non-Fijian borrowers much more than Fijian ones.

Table 6.4 Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board Loans By Race 1952-1961

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952/3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7,433</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1,457</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15,000</td>
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<td>7,500</td>
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<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953/54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5,230</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,323</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954/55</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2,277</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,750</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955/56</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2,634</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>146</td>
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<tr>
<td>1956/57</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13,435</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1,276</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,167</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957/58</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6,293</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,367</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958/59</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,899</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,433</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>217</td>
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<tr>
<td>1959/60</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4,512</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6,558</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,370</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of IS 52 53 34 5 5 2 2 25 7


In the 1950s the Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board was profoundly biased against Fijians and in favour of Europeans. In the period 1952/53-1960/61, Europeans received 15 per cent of all loans and 52 per cent of all money while Fijians obtained 25 per cent of the loans but only 7 per cent of the money. And it is significant that the Board’s lending to Fijians improved sharply in 1960 and 1961 - after the submission of the Spate and Burns Reports. But even then, Fijians still figured worse than Europeans.

The Burns Commission’s major recommendations for state initiatives for Fijian economic advancement had to do with agrarian reform. Agricultural policy, it suggested, should be changed and geared towards the ‘emergence of the independent farmer’ and the specific areas which it pointed to included land policy, agricultural extension services, credit provision and marketing arrangements. Further, it suggested a series of agricultural projects ranging from tea production to cattle ranching.
Acting on these recommendations, the colonial state announced in June 1961 that a Land Development Authority would be established to promote and assist the "investigation, formation and carrying out of projects for the development, improvement and settlement of land" *(Fiji Times* 24 June 1961). In particular, the Authority would "give the Fijian community...assistance in the development of their land" *(Fiji Times* 2 August 1961). In August, the Land Development Authority (LDA) was formed and in conjunction with the Fijian Administration set about its task. The showpiece of this experiment in Fijian economic advancement was the Lomaivuna banana project but barely six years later it collapsed. Other projects suffered the same fate.

During the 1960s there was a distinct pattern of agricultural lending by the Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board which corresponded closely to the fortunes of the agrarian experiment. Between 1960 and 1965, when the experiment was mooted and then implemented, the number of agricultural loans given by the Board rose from 92 to 2,140. From 1966 onwards, however, when projects began to collapse, the number of agricultural loans fell off sharply. The figure for 1966 was 740; by 1969 it had dropped to 280 (see annual reports of the Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board 1960-1967, and annual reports of the Fiji Development Bank 1968-1971).

By the mid 1960s, then, economic projects in which the Fijian Administration was involved showed virtually no promise of success. When Cyril Belshaw published his authoritative work *Under The Ivi Tree* in 1964, he presented the first public explanation for the failure of the Fijian Administration as an agent of Fijian economic development. His access to officials and documents of the Administration allowed him to acquire unique insights and his analysis was widely respected. He concluded that

> the effects of the Fijian Administration on the economic growth of the Fijian people have been little short of disastrous, and the source of much of the difficulty lies within the structure and philosophy of the Administration as a political unit (Belshaw 1964:236).

Belshaw acknowledged that the Administration was hampered by organizational weaknesses and lack of funds but the thrust of his criticism is clearly aimed at its domination by the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie. For example, in the appointment of officers, he claimed that the Administration 'leaned heavily on the side of family position and benign paternal, even aristocratic authority' *(ibid.*). More generally, it tended 'to lean on autocratic authority and to exercise it arbitrarily and sometimes capriciously' *(ibid.*).

Belshaw pointed to the deep structural and ideological bias of the Fijian Administration towards the class interests of chiefs and other
members of the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Some years later Norton took up the same theme and said of the Fijian Affairs Board that 'its conservatism, reflected its domination by a political elite of chiefs linked as a multiplex group by kin or affinal ties, and by associations in the Council of Chiefs and Legislative Council' (Norton 1972:223).

Given its class character, the failure of the Fijian Administration to alleviate the plight of the Fijian labouring classes is not surprising. It is true, of course, that the Administration was restricted in what it could achieve by its limited resources and, more generally, by its limited power within the wider political economy. Our point, however, is that it was even more limited by its internal class bias.

The attack on the Fijian Administration by the Spate and Burns Commissions was unwelcome within Fijian ruling circles. Yet within those circles, also, there existed some recognition that Fijian commoners were increasingly disgruntled at the failure of the Fijian Administration to improve their lot. Unless something was done, the constraining effect of the Administration on the Fijian labouring classes would rebound on the Fijian elite sooner or later. Consequently, although the Council of Chiefs, at its meeting in 1960, rejected the Burns Commission's recommendation for the gradual abolition of the Fijian Administration, it did agree to some changes. A review of the Administration was initiated and various changes were implemented in 1962 and 1967. Rusiate Nayacakalou, the man appointed to oversee the reorganization, claimed that the changes were linked to a 'clamour for freedom' among the Fijian people living in the villages (quoted in Cole et al. 1984:5).

Rodney Cole and his colleagues have recently suggested that in agreeing to reorganization the chiefs acted on their 'profound concern for the Fijian people'. The motivation for change, they suggest, came from the 'top down' (ibid.:6). Our argument, however, is quite the reverse. It is probably true that there were chiefs who were genuinely concerned. The point, however, is that in order to defend their interests as a class they had to accept change. The particular system of administration which they dominated and which was supposed to advance the welfare of their followers did not measure up to expectations. They could always abolish the system and sacrifice their own class interests. Alternatively they could resist change and risk further erosion of commoner loyalty, or they could agree to a reorganization and hope by this means to stem commoner discontent.

Our argument is that there were structural forces at work and social developments occurring which were simply much larger than even the genuine concerns of individuals. The administrative structure the chiefs dominated was stifling the progress of those it was supposed to serve. Consequently it had to adapt to the realities of the times, to
promote individualism and economic competitiveness among the Fijian people. Custom and tradition were seen as impediments to economic advancement; village life, and the communal responsibilities entailed by it, was also regarded as an obstacle to be overcome rather than a way of life to be strengthened and enhanced (ibid.).

But as the administrative straitjacket was loosened, Fijian doubts about the efficacy of the experiment persisted. Despite reorganization, Fijian economic initiatives continued to fail. Also, geared as it was to the rural setting, the Fijian administration seemed incapable of responding adequately to new Fijian economic aspirations. The economic boom was not in agriculture but in tourism, commerce, building, transportation and the state sector. And Fijians wanted a piece of the action.

Evidence of the changing character of Fijian economic aspirations emerged as early as 1959 when a Fijian peasant organization, Dra ni Lami, was formed in western Viti Levu. It did not last long but was revived two years later as a cooperative organization known as the Bula Tale. It too had a short life. Many might have believed R.A. Kearsley when, in December 1964, he told the Legislative Council that the Fijian was ‘not good at commerce’ and that his economic salvation lay in the land (Burns et al. 1960:47).

But many Fijians had different ideas. In 1965, as the tourist boom got underway, the short-lived Fijian Advancement Party called on the colonial state (and, significantly, not the Fijian Administration) to initiate a ‘full-scale Fijian economic development plan’ (Fiji Times 1 April 1965). It identified poor education as the key reason for Fijian economic backwardness and drew this telling comparison: ‘Practically all professional, trained Fijians, except the clergy, are in the Government service. The independent Indian middle class is weak but the Fijian one is non-existent, and this [is] a serious matter’ (ibid.).

In the following May, Ratu Mara told the Annual Convention of the Fijian Association that the reason for the poor standard of higher education among Fijians was their financial situation, and against the view that Fijian economic advancement lay in agriculture, he argued thus: ‘our economy does not depend on the soil alone...Industries will increase in importance in the future and they will provide a variety of jobs’ (Fiji Times 28 June 1966). Fijians, therefore, should be encouraged to look to the industrial sector for a livelihood.

The next convention of the Fijian Association, held in May 1967, had as its theme ‘the economic weakness of the Fijian people’. Many Fijians had by this time taken up jobs in the tourist industry but only a few had set up their own businesses. Said Ratu Edward Cakobau, then member for Commerce, Industry and Tourism: ‘the general opinion of
experts [is] that there [is] not one single project...[involving] Fijians which [had] continued for any noticeable length of time' (Fiji Times 23 May 1967). Fijians, he argued, exhibited a 'definite absence of commercial awareness', unreliability, and the lack of 'authority, leadership and cohesion'. And that, he added, was unfortunate because it was 'of vital importance' that Fijians derived a major direct benefit from tourism.

It is interesting that lack of capital did not figure in Cakobau's list of reasons for Fijian failures, all the more so because the largest loans given by the Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board during the 1960s went to the tourist sector. (See Table 6.5 below.) What is more, they were given to a very small number of borrowers - less than five in each year! A racial breakdown of the Board's loans in the 1960s is not available but it is unlikely, given the racial pattern of the preceding decade, that the relatively huge tourist loans went to Fijians. More than likely, they went to Europeans. If that was the case, then Ratu Cakobau's admonition of Fijians for their unreliability and lack of commercial awareness needs to be tempered by the racist, and in particular anti-Fijian, bias of the colonial state's lending policy. Again we ask: how could Fijians have possibly competed successfully in the face of structural disadvantages such as this?

### Table 6.5 Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board Loans Profile 1960-1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agric. Sector</th>
<th>Indust. Sector</th>
<th>% of Total Value</th>
<th>No. of loans to Agric. Sector</th>
<th>No. of loans to Indust. Sector</th>
<th>No. of loans to Tourism Sector</th>
<th>Average Loan Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agric.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>£803</td>
<td>£3,879</td>
<td>£15,861</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>1,530</td>
<td>4,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>91</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>3,155</td>
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<td>1964</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>4,775</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>10,118</td>
<td>62,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>10,036</td>
<td>34,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$740</td>
<td>$28,326</td>
<td>$28,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>28,734</td>
<td>27,333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general tenor of discussions at the May 1967 convention of the Fijian Association testified to growing Fijian concern about their economic ‘backwardness’ generally and the failure of Fijian businesses in particular. A significant response to that concern was the formation of the Fijian Chamber of Commerce in March 1968. At its official opening, which was attended by more than 4,000 Fijians, the president, Viliame Savu, delivered this message ‘from the Fijian people’:

Please co-operate with us and lay no obstacle across the path of seeking people. The absence of Fijians in the business field [is] not only a challenge to the Fijians themselves, it is also a question to be answered by the British Government (Fiji Times 26 March 1968).

The aim of the Chamber, he later told the Fiji Times, was ‘to assist Fijians with commercial experience and training and their business operations generally’ (ibid.). But the Chamber did not last very long. Despondency at the failure of yet another Fijian initiative was lifted when the Fijian Association announced in November 1968 that it would establish a ‘development corporation to centralise and control Fijian economic efforts’. The corporation would be ‘owned and controlled by Fijians’ (Fiji Times 30 November 1968). In April 1969 the Fijian Investments and Development Corporation was formed. It was sponsored by the ‘Fijian chiefs of the major provinces headed by the Vunivalu of Bau, Ratu George Cakobau, the Chief Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Ratu Edward Cakobau and Ratu Penaia Ganilau’ (Fiji Times 10 April 1969). Although two board members were from the country’s western region, the corporation was clearly dominated by easterners, particularly from Lau, Bau and Cakaudrove. The corporation lasted longer than earlier initiatives, but it too, like others which followed later, ended in failure.

Aiming for state power: the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie

On the eve of independence, then, the list of Fijian business failures had grown considerably. Fijian attempts at constituting an indigenous capitalist class had not succeeded. Yet, in the face of a whole series of economic and competitive disadvantages, it was virtually impossible for a Fijian capitalist class to emerge. Neither established capitalist interests nor the colonial state were willing to create economic space for the development of a Fijian bourgeoisie.

However, by the middle of the 1960s an alternative route to that goal emerged — state power. Once it became clear that independence
would come, aspiring Fijians saw in state power the most likely route towards the development of an indigenous bourgeoisie. And as we shall see, the contest for state power was essentially a bourgeois contest, a contest in which the masses figured little and which produced a multiracial bourgeois alliance dominated by Fijians.

By the beginning of the 1960s, anti-imperialist struggles in British colonies had gathered momentum and the 'winds of change' which blew over Africa and Asia soon reached Fiji. In March 1960 the secretary of state for the colonies, Ian Macleod, informed the House of Commons that he had no plans for further constitutional reforms in Fiji beyond the few changes incorporated in the Fiji Letters Patent which came into effect at the beginning of that year. (Those changes had to do largely with the election of Fijian members to the Legislative Council. Later that year the under secretary, Julian Amery, seemed to reaffirm Britain's position: 'drastic' constitutional changes would not be introduced (Fiji Times 28 October 1960).

But those statements did not dampen growing speculation within Fiji about the country's political future. When the Legislative Council debated the question of constitutional change in December 1960, the matter of Fijian interests immediately came to the fore. Ratu Mara, for example, insisted that if change was to come, then control of the land must pass to Fijians (Fiji Times 15 December 1960). Early in 1961 the colonial state proposed constitutional changes leading to internal self-government. Immediately the Fiji Times, mouthpiece of white capital, called for an 'All-Fiji Convention' to discuss the proposals. Many Indians favoured the changes but reiterated their call for a common roll. Representatives of local European capital rejected the idea of self-government: 'any change in the constitutional position is desired by no more than a small minority' (Fiji Times 14 April 1961). Motions of opposition were passed at meetings of the predominantly-white Suva and Federated Chambers of Commerce (Fiji Times 14, 18 April 1961). When the proposed changes were debated in the Legislative Council in April, Fijian Council members again used the opportunity to make strong statements about Fijian rights. The anti-Indian bias of the alliance between local white capital and the chiefly class was unmistakeable.

The intensity of the bias was underlined in the following August when the Council debated the overseas aid scheme and in the course of the proceedings Ravuama Vunivalu staked a claim for the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie. He called for 'Fijian supremacy in the Civil Service' and challenged Indian members to make known their attitude towards that.

Nevertheless the Fijian leadership was still unsure about its position on independence. In the early stages of 1962 their attitude was that should Britain withdraw from the country then Fijians must be
given control. Realizing, however, that the pressure for constitutional change was mounting, they had to clarify their position. Consequently the Fijian Association, the leading indigenous organization, convened a series of meetings to discuss the matter. At the end of the year Ravuama Vunivalu told the Legislative Council that Fijians did not want independence and that constitutional changes should be introduced only when Fijians expressed a wish for them. Not surprisingly the local European members of the Council supported their stand. Indians did not (Fiji Times 13 December 1962).

Fijian opposition to independence stemmed primarily from the general weakness of the Fijian position. Fijians lacked economic clout and the resources necessary for Fijian political mobilization. They were organizationally weak and possessed few politically-experienced members. Importantly, there were still no firm signs from the colonial state of any commitment to the ‘paramountcy of Fijian interests’. In short, the Fijian leadership was not sufficiently strong to mount a bid for state power.

Soon after Vunivalu’s statement to the Council, the new under secretary of state for the colonies, Nigel Fisher, gave assurances that the principles of the Deed of Cession were ‘inviolate’ (Fiji Times 22 January 1963). To the Fijian leadership it was comforting news but no immediate change of position took place. When the United Nations Committee on Decolonization began discussing Britain’s failure to take Fiji towards self-determination, Fijian and European leaders rebuked it. Ratu Edward Cakobau, Ratu Mara, Ravuama Vunivalu and Semesa Sikivou issued this statement:

Whatever the Committee of 24 might have to say about the government of our country, the Fijian members of the Legislative Council, on behalf of our people, want it to be known that we do not desire their interference nor are we impressed with their much publicised utterances (Fiji Times 5 July 1963).

Again the European members supported them. John Falvey declared:

All right thinking people will treat the vapourings of certain representatives in the Committee on Colonialism with disdain...We shall hear no more of this nonsense (Fiji Times 6 July 1963).

It was not to be of course. Pressure from the United Nations continued.

With anti-imperialist pressure continuing to grow, Britain finally announced in August 1963 that a conference would be convened to discuss constitutional changes in Fiji. Some Fijians were indignant. The Fijian leadership, however, recognized that the tide of events
pointed strongly in one direction and preparations should be made. State power was at stake, and all the economic benefits that might flow from it.

The level of Fijian political activity now increased. The details of that activity are not important here; our main concern is to identify some of the major developments in order to see how the dynamics of race and class shaped the struggle for state power. In particular, we want to see how racist ideology and practice was intensified in order to consolidate the alliance between white capital and the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie.

Alliance, multiracialism and Fijian political dominance

The formation in 1964 of two Fijian political parties in western Viti Levu underlined the significance of the regional cleavage which divided Fijians. In Sabeto, Nadi, Apisai Tora formed the Fijian Democratic Party, which was an offshoot of the earlier but short-lived Western Democratic Party. Isikeli Nadalo formed the Fijian National Party and later in the year made submissions to the governor, asking that Fijians be given a 'prominent place' in the political control of the country (Fiji Times 8 September 1964). Also in Nadi, a group of mainly professional Indians formed the Fiji Labour Party (no connection to the present Fiji Labour Party) and called for a common roll and an 'attempt to eradicate economic exploitation of the masses by ruthless capitalists' (Fiji Times 25 August 1964).

The Fijian Association also considered its position on constitutional change at a meeting in June and held another in January 1965 led by Ratu Mara, Ratu George Cakobau, Ratu Penaia Ganilau (eastern chiefs all) and Josua Rabukawaqa. The proposed Constitutional Conference was scheduled for the following August, so a clear position had to be worked out. Very importantly, also in January 1965 Ayodhya Prasad, secretary of the Kisan Sangh, initiated moves for the formation of yet another party, the National Congress of Fiji. This was eventually to become the third leg of Alliance Party, the Indian Alliance.

By the end of February 1965, the Fijian Association had established, or was in the process of establishing, new branches in Suva and Nausori in the east and Nadi and Lautoka in the west. Representatives of local white capital also took steps to defend their position. Suva lawyer R.G.Kermode urged Europeans in the west to formulate a position for the forthcoming constitutional conference. The predominantly-Indian Federation Party, formed in the aftermath of the sugarcane farmers' strike in 1960, stood firm in its resolve to push for a common roll. And in Labasa an Indian lawyer, H. Kohli, formed the Fiji Independent Liberal Party to hasten the advent of self-government and promote racial unity (Fiji Times 4 May 1965).
In June, however, the ideal of racial unity was jolted when about 4,000 people, mainly Fijians, attended a meeting of the Fijian Democratic Party and heard its leader, Apisai Tora, insist that there should be no Indian representatives at the constitutional conference and that a commission be set up to arrange for the resettlement of Indians outside Fiji (Fiji Times 18 June 1965). To Europeans, he extended a 'hand of friendship' but added a warning: '[N]o monkey business please. Make no mistake about our determination to fight for and win our rights' (Fiji Times 19 June 1965).

Even as Tora was fuelling racist sentiment, the Fijian Association, the political arm of chief-dominated Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie, was moving to forge an alliance with certain sections of the Indian community. In a strategic political move, the Fijian Association invited Indians to hold joint discussions before the forthcoming conference but stressed that what it wanted was unity, not a common roll (Fiji Times 14 June 1965). Its calculated move marked the beginning of a major turnaround in the dynamics of race and class in Fiji.

The Fijian Association felt that a common electoral roll for an independent Fiji would favour the Indian-dominated Federation Party. By building bridges with sections of the Indian community, it hoped to weaken support for a common roll. Such an alliance would have the even bigger advantage of being multiracial. If the Fijian Association could bring together - and dominate - a multiracial political grouping, then not only would its chances of thwarting moves towards a common roll be greater but also its position would be strengthened considerably because the alliance it would lead would be much more 'representative' of Fiji society and hence more appealing and acceptable.

About a week after the Fijian Association issued its invitation, the National Congress of Fiji called for the various races to work 'hand in hand'. A few days later, on 25 June, a 'representative' group of Fijian, Indian and European political leaders met in Suva and 'reached unanimous conclusions on a number of constitutional matters, including opposition to a common roll for Legislative Council elections' (Fiji Times 28 June 1965). Present at the meeting were those who subsequently formed the nucleus of the Alliance Party: Ratu Mara, Ratu Edward Cakobau, Ratu George Cakobau, Semesa Sikivou, John Falvey, Vijay R. Singh, K.S. Reddy, James Shankar Singh and Manikam Pillai. The last four represented the National Congress of Fiji. Later they would spearhead the formation of the Indian Alliance.

A statement issued by the 25 June meeting described the event as a 'turning point towards racial understanding and tolerance at a responsible level in Fiji' (ibid.). It also said that similar meetings would be held both before and after the constitutional conference in London in order to 'maintain the goodwill created and to put into resolute action the decisions made by the representatives' (ibid.). A major turnabout
Beyond the Politics of Race

had occurred in the dynamics of race and class. The chief-dominated Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie and local white capital had forged an alliance with bourgeois Indians and the ideology of racialism began to give way to its opposite — multiracialism.

The most crucial aspect of this whole development was its bourgeois character. Essentially a petty bourgeois contest, the struggle for state power nonetheless had all the appearances of being a racial one. Because the struggle was dominated by bourgeois leaders who defined and waged their battle along racial lines, the underlying class, and in particular bourgeois, character of the struggle for state power remained hidden. Even the vast majority of the working classes saw developments in racial terms, hence it is not surprising that the class interests of Fiji's labouring masses figured little. The emergent ideology of multiracialism was, indeed, a major development in that it put a new face on the racial form of Fiji politics. But as with the ideology of racialism which it came to replace, multiracialism also hid the underlying class content of Fiji politics. The racial form of the class struggle now had a different and more acceptable face but it remained racial nonetheless. And that change in appearance left the underlying system of class exploitation virtually intact.

Note, however, that we say the system of class exploitation rather than the class structure. The new ideology of multiracialism was necessary in order to change the class structure; in particular, it was necessary in order to ensure Fijian state power, strengthen the Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie and, very importantly, apply that power to constitute a Fijian capitalist class. As we shall see, the first two objectives would be achieved but not the third. But first we return to the historic meeting of 25 June 1965.

Enthusiastic in its praise for the outcome of the meeting, the Fiji Times applauded the 'statesmanlike' approach of those involved and berated the four members of the Federation Party who refused to attend — A.D. Patel, Siddiq Koya, James Madhavan and C.A. Shah. At a similar meeting in July, representatives of the Chinese and various Pacific Island communities were also present to give to the Fijian and European delegates at the London conference full authority to represent them. At the same time the predominantly-Muslim Fiji Minority Party sent a memorandum to the secretary of state for the colonies asking for separate Muslim representation in any future legislature (Fiji Times 19 July 1965).

The Constitutional Conference was held at Marlborough House in London and ended on 9 August 1965. Its principal recommendations were the retention of the communal electoral system; an enlarged Legislative Council with fourteen Fijian, twelve Indian and ten General Elector seats; and a ministerial system of government. The first, not unexpectedly, proved the thorny issue of the meeting and both at and
after the conference condemnation was heaped on the representatives of the Federation Party for their opposition to communal rolls. In the following December the recommendations were debated in the Legislative Council and accepted. That seal of approval was a major victory for the bourgeois alliance which had been formed just six weeks earlier. More importantly, it boosted the likelihood of Fijian state power in independent Fiji. Eight months later, in February 1966, a General Electors Association was formed, membership being open to all voters registered on the General Roll. A few days later, a meeting of ‘more than sixty men and women of all of Fiji’s major races’ resolved to form a ‘political alliance or organization’ concerned with the welfare of the people of Fiji. In March 1966 the Alliance Party was formally launched. Among its objectives was the promotion of ‘goodwill, tolerance, understanding and harmony among all the Colony’s communities’ (*Fiji Times* 28 February 1966). Multiracialism was thus embraced as the ideology of the party which would enjoy almost uninterrupted power until its defeat in April 1987.

In a test of strength, the Alliance Party soundly defeated the Federation Party in the 1966 elections, winning twenty-three seats to the Federation’s nine, the remaining four going to two independent candidates and two nominees of the Council of Chiefs. Deeply dissatisfied with the outcome of both the constitutional conference and the elections, the Federation Party tabled a motion in the Legislative Council in September 1967 calling for a new constitutional conference. Vijay R. Singh, minister for Social Services, immediately opposed it and moved an amendment. As he spoke the opposition staged a mass walkout.

In the resulting by-elections, which were held between 31 August and 7 September 1968, all nine opposition members were returned with increased majorities. To the Alliance Party, but more particularly its Fijian members, their success was a slap in the face. Leading Fijian members of the party immediately initiated a Colony-wide campaign to find out whether or not Fijians wanted independence and a common roll. A meeting of some 2,000 Fijians in Suva on Wednesday 9 September ‘unanimously voted against independence and a common roll’ (*Fiji Times* 13 September 1968). Strong views against the Federation Party were also expressed and a statement issued after the meeting said:

> the control of the land should be returned to Fijian hands, by force if need be...No further abuse levelled against Fijian chiefs and traditions by the Federation Party will be tolerated as from now (ibid.).
Twenty years later, during the 1987 election campaign and the pre-coup agitation of the Taukei Movement, precisely the same demands were expressed.

Three days after the Suva meeting, another meeting was held in Vatukoula. About 3,000 Fijians attended and again intensely anti-Indian feelings were expressed. Suggestions were also made that leases of Fijian land to Indians should not be renewed and that Indians be deported. The leasing of Fijian land to Indians, it was said, was a "gesture of goodwill" but the outcome of the by-elections showed that the Fijian people had been 'deceived by the Indians' (Fiji Times 16 September 1968). A few days later, a spokesman for the national committee of the Fijian Association warned that 'any moves to make Fijians second-class citizens' would be resisted — with force if necessary. He added:

Should social strife break out in the Colony, the Federation Party will be held fully responsible for it...Fijians are not going to fight...for the Indianization of Fiji (Fiji Times 17 September 1968).

The growing racial tension prompted the Synod of the Diocese of Polynesia to call on the leaders of the country to take 'immediate joint action' to prevent the country from being split by racial differences (Fiji Times 19 September 1968). One week later, Ratu Mara, the chief minister, announced that the Fijian people felt 'betrayed and alarmed' and that they intended to have their interests defended (Fiji Times 27 September 1968). The very next day, chiefs led a procession of about 2,000 people through Ba. Escorting the chiefs were Fijians in traditional costumes and daubed with war paint. Twenty years later, similarly dressed Fijians conveyed the same threatening message when they put down a lovo (earth oven) in the grounds of government buildings in Suva.

The Federation Party did not respond publicly to these events but the Fiji Muslims Political Organization did. It announced its 'whole-hearted support' for Fijian opposition to a common roll and called on all Muslims to support the Fijians 'politically and materially' (Fiji Times 19 November 1968).

At the same time, Indian supporters of the Alliance Party formed a National Political Organization of Fiji Indians and announced that they would seek affiliation with the Alliance. The organization was the forerunner of the Indian Alliance, the third constituent body of the party. The other two, the Fijian Association and the General Electors Association, were already established. Included in the interim committee of the new organization were Vijay R. Singh, James Shankar Singh, Ayodhya Prasad and M.T. Khan. The first three had earlier represented the National Congress of Fiji at the historic meeting
of 15 June 1965. Vijay Singh was, by now, a minister; his uncle, James Singh, would be similarly rewarded later.

With the Alliance Party now looking nicely multiracial, the next task was to seek a rapprochement with the opposition. But why should that be necessary? After all, the Alliance’s resounding electoral victory in 1966, supported by the increasing power of multiracialism as an ideology, pointed strongly to Fijian state power in the future.

The need for rapprochement with the Federation Party had to do essentially with the viability of a Fijian-dominated postcolonial state. The bulk of the country’s wealth was produced by a predominantly-Indian farmer class which gave much more allegiance to the Federation Party than the Alliance. To alienate that class would mean risking a large portion of the finance on which the postcolonial state would inevitably depend. It was better, therefore, to seek some accommodation with the Federation Party than to let ill-feelings fester.

In May 1969 Ratu Mara was in London to attend a meeting of the International Sugar Council. He refused to invite A.D. Patel, the leader of the Federation Party, to accompany him. The gap between the two men had always been enormous. But in an interview with the BBC, Mara said that if there was a prospect of agreement between the major political parties in Fiji, then another constitutional conference would be called. Back in Suva in the following June he announced that discussions on a new constitution for Fiji would be held between the two major parties. Those discussions commenced in the following August but there was little progress.

In October, A.D. Patel died. ‘A contentious figure’, as Ahmed Ali put it, ‘was removed from the scene’ (Ali 1980:160). Siddiq Koya, a lawyer and a Muslim, assumed the leadership of the Federation Party and soon proved rather more amenable to cooperation than his predecessor (Fiji Times 8 October 1969). By the end of the year, significant agreement between the two parties was reached.

In January 1970 Lord Shepard, minister of state for foreign and Commonwealth affairs, returned to London satisfied with the degree of agreement and soon afterwards Britain declared its ‘readiness’ to grant independence to Fiji. Further inter-party talks were held and in April the second constitutional conference began at Marlborough House in London.

The high level of pre-conference agreement paved the way for a meeting which lacked the rancour and bitterness of the earlier one. On the thorny issue of the electoral system, it was agreed that communal rolls would be retained but also that sometime after the next general election (scheduled for 1972) a Commission of Inquiry would be appointed to investigate ‘the most appropriate method of election and representation in Fiji’. It was a significant compromise. Also, it was agreed that there should be an equal number of Fijian and Indian seats.
But on the number of general elector seats, Ratu Mara and the British delegation disagreed. The British recommended three, Ratu Mara insisted on eight. And when it became clear that the former would not change, the high chief from Lau threatened to resign as chief minister upon his return to Fiji. Thereupon the British delegation agreed to Mara's figure of eight. Thus was secured the gross over-representation of general electors which Mara believed would ensure continued Alliance dominance. Representing a mere 6 per cent of the population, general electors would have 15 per cent of the seats. In this manner Fiji became independent from Britain on 10 October 1970, after exactly 96 years of British rule.
Chapter 7

Fijian State Power - For Fijians or the Ruling Class?

Having won state power, the Alliance Party was now faced with the task of delivering on its promises. The euphoria surrounding independence strengthened the popularity of the government and its first two years of office were relatively easy. But by 1973 the honeymoon period had ended.

As we have seen, a significant feature of the struggle for state power was the major change in the ruling ideology. The vehement anti-Indian racism of the early 1960s gave way to the ideology of multiracialism. Once it became clear in the second half of the decade that power would pass to a Fijian state bourgeoisie dominated by eastern chiefs and their commoner allies, the moderation of anti-Indian sentiment became possible. Clearly, however, such a change was necessary, not only to placate local Indian capital but more importantly at that stage to avoid jeopardizing the lifeblood of the economy - sugar. Most of the sugarcane farmers were Indian and aligned with the National Federation Party. For them multiracialism would have little meaning if it did not advance their standard of living.

In 1969 Lord Denning was appointed to arbitrate in the dispute between the CSR and the cane farmers over the terms of the new ten-year agreement. The CSR had done well under the Eve Contract concluded ten years previously, and if it could secure a similar contract now, it would stay (Moynagh 1981:222). But the Denning Award favoured the farmers and, very importantly, in the negotiations leading up to the award the Alliance Party threw its weight behind the farmers. It could hardly have done otherwise; not to have done so would have meant risking the legitimacy of the Fijian-dominated state that was soon to emerge. In 1973 the company sold its operations to the state and withdrew from Fiji. In 1969, then, the Alliance Party had supported the farmers and strengthened its claim to the state. In office in 1973, it inherited the underlying tensions and contradictions which formerly lay beneath the relationship between the CSR and the farmers.

Another important development was the enactment of the 1973 Trade Disputes Act. By the end of 1972 the contradictions which lay
beneath the economic boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s were beginning to surface. As they deepened, class tensions increased, and when the trade union movement sought to defend the interests of workers, the highly repressive act was passed. The restrictive effect of the act soon began to tell, but the state also engaged in a series of initiatives aimed at establishing a formal arrangement through which industrial relations could be better regulated. In 1976 the Tripartite Forum was established and until its collapse in 1986 it was to serve as a cornerstone for the management of class conflict.

A third development in 1973 was the sacking of assistant minister for Commerce and Industry, Sakeasi Butadroka, for criticizing the Alliance government's failure to improve the economic situation of Fijians. The problem of Fijian economic disadvantage, as we noted in the previous chapter, was a central and recurring theme in the lead-up to independence. Butadroka's attack brought the issue out into the open again and gave it new urgency. The Alliance did not tolerate his criticism but certainly heeded his warning by promptly addressing the issue he had raised. Various initiatives were undertaken and Fijian hopes for economic advancement were raised. As we shall see, however, the Alliance failed in this crucial project - crucial because the legitimacy of the state depended most critically on the support of Fijians. In this chapter we will be centrally concerned with how and why it failed in that task.

The limits and class bias of Fijian state power

The economic boom of the 1960s carried over into the early 1970s but by 1973 the signs of economic stress began to appear. The situation was worsened by the increase in oil prices in October of that year and by 1974 Fiji was locked in a deep and prolonged economic recession which extended into the 1980s. As Table 7.1 below shows, economic expansion in the early years after independence was followed by an extended period of sluggish economic growth.

Alongside the sluggish economic growth was the relative failure of the Alliance government to realize its objective of economic diversification. This is indicated by the figures in Table 7.2. Apart from a few significant changes, the structure of the economy remained fairly constant after independence. The main changes had to do with the relative shrinking of the economy's productive base - agriculture and industry - against a corresponding increase in the services sector, especially the state sector. By 1986 the contribution of 'government and other services' to GDP had more than doubled from 9.1 per cent to 19.7 per cent.
Table 7.1 Annual Growth in Gross Domestic Product
1971-1985

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>157.6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>7.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>191.6</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>196.6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>202.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

at constant 1968 prices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>$million</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>605.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>616.6</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>690.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
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<td>1981</td>
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<td>712.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
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<td>-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984(r)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985(p)</td>
<td>705.4</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986(p)</td>
<td>767.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These broad changes had important political implications, particularly with regard to the Alliance’s power base — the Fijians. Fijians were heavily concentrated in the rural areas, and as we shall see made up the bulk of the peasantry. The structural shift against agriculture might therefore be seen as having posed an objective threat to rural Fijian support for the ruling Alliance Party. However, peasant conservatism and the persistent strength of traditional chiefly authority in the countryside helped to maintain general Fijian peasant support for the Alliance. But as the Alliance painfully discovered in the elections of April 1977, the loyalty of the Fijian peasantry could not be taken for granted. We will take up this issue again later.
### Table 7.2 Sectoral Composition of Gross Domestic Product 1970-86

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1970 (%)</th>
<th>1975 (%)</th>
<th>1980 (%)</th>
<th>1985 (%)</th>
<th>1986 (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
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<td>23.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
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<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas &amp; water</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport &amp; communication</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking/insurance/real estate</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government &amp; other services</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other branches</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imputed service charges</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net indirect taxes</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP at market prices</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The massive growth in the public sector also had important consequences for the Alliance's Fijian support. Of all the races, Fijians were most heavily reliant on the state for employment. In 1986, for example, 47 per cent of Fijian wage and salary earners were employed in the public sector. The corresponding figures for Indians and others were 31 per cent and 33 per cent respectively (Fiji Census Office 1987). With this degree of Fijian dependence on state employment, any attacks by the Alliance government on workers generally in the public sector ran the risk of alienating Fijian support. As we shall see later, by the 1980s the Public Servants Association had emerged as the largest and most militant union in the country. And its attempts to improve the lot of its members were complicated by the state's ever increasing budget deficit. (See Table 7.3 below.)
Table 7.3  Public Debt of the central government,  
1976-1986  
($million)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The problems facing the Alliance government were, of course, exacerbated by its persistent external dependence. The trade deficit grew throughout the 1970s and 1980s, more than doubling from $100.3 million in 1973 to $236.6 million in 1985.

Table 7.4  Balance of Trade, 1970-1985  
($million)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-28</td>
<td>-100</td>
<td>-116</td>
<td>-153</td>
<td>-208</td>
<td>-237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Also, the external debt continued to impose a considerable burden on the country’s resources. In 1984, for example, it represented 36 per cent of GDP and 73 per cent of exports.

Table 7.5  External Debt Burden 1975-1984  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sugar and tourism maintained their leading positions as the largest sources of export earnings, and together accounted for around 66 per cent of foreign revenue. Fiji has been fortunate in having guaranteed markets and prices for the great bulk of its sugar, a factor which for a long time was a key to Fiji's stability. In 1970 83 per cent of Fiji's sugar was sold under preferential arrangements and in 1985 the figure was 78 per cent. Tourism accounted for between 26 per cent and 55 per cent in the decade to 1983 and was responsible for an increasing proportion of paid employment — from 9.4 per cent in 1971 to 16.5 per cent in 1985. However, considerable foreign ownership and a high import content meant that the industry had a higher leakage factor than any other except mining.

In part because of the requirements of the tourist and tourist-related industries, Fiji continued to rely heavily on imported fuel, manufactured goods, machinery and equipment, which in 1970 accounted for 66 per cent of the total import bill and in 1985 70 per cent (Taylor 1987a; Britton 1987).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.6 Composition of Imports (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuels, lubricants etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufactured goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery and equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. manufactures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Japan and the United States continued to be Fiji's major trading partners after independence. As buyer of the bulk of Fiji's sugar, the United Kingdom remained the single most important export market but declined as a source of imports. New Zealand and Japan maintained their relative positions, particularly as suppliers. Trade with Southeast
Asia increased but remained comparatively small. Australia, on the other hand, firmly established itself as Fiji's main trading partner. By far the major source of imports, it has become an increasingly important export market, particularly after the signing of the Sparteca Agreement in 1980.¹

### Table 7.7 Direction of Trade 1970-1985 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>NZ</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exports</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Imports** | | | | | | |
| 1970 | 17 | 24 | 12 | 15 | 4 | 28 |
| 1975 | 13 | 29 | 12 | 16 | 4 | 26 |
| 1980 | 7 | 31 | 15 | 14 | 7 | 26 |
| 1985 | 5 | 35 | 17 | 15 | 4 | 24 |


Australia's preeminence in Fiji's external trade parallels its leading position as a foreign investor in Fiji. In 1971 41 per cent of foreign companies in Fiji were Australian; ten years later the figure had risen to 43 per cent. British companies were the next most numerous but as a proportion of the total fell from 23 per cent to 14 per cent (Carstairs and Prasad 1981:11). But more important than the number of foreign companies in Fiji is the extent of their dominance.

Apart from the sugar industry, where the processing and sale of sugar is controlled by the state-owned Fiji Sugar Corporation and Fiji Sugar Marketing Corporation respectively, the key sectors of the

---

¹ The South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Co-operation (Sparteca) Agreement was signed in July 1980. It gives South Pacific island countries preferential access to the Australian and New Zealand markets.
Beyond the Politics of Race

economy are dominated by foreign corporations. This is also the case in the tourism sector (see below). The giants of the distribution sector are the Australian corporations W. R. Carpenters and Burns Philip. Emperor Gold Mines, another Australian firm, monopolizes the goldmining industry. International travel and transportation are dominated by such companies as Qantas, Air New Zealand, P&O Line, Kyowa Shipping, Sofrana Unilines, Bank Line and Columbus Line. And the very important financial sector is also dominated by Westpac Banking Corporation, Australia and New Zealand Bank, Colonial Mutual Life Assurance, Queensland Insurance (Australian companies all), Bank of New Zealand, Bank of Baroda, and New India Assurance Company Limited. In other sectors as well, foreign capital has a significant presence: for example, British Petroleum in the pine industry, Colgate Palmolive and Cope Allman in manufacturing, Carreras of Fiji and Central Manufacturing Company in tobacco, Watties Industries in the chicken industry, and until recently C. Itoh Limited in commercial fisheries.

This picture of foreign capital’s commanding position in the economy is reflected in the figures in Table 7.8. In 1980 foreign companies accounted for 100 per cent of turnover in the utilities sector, 99.6 per cent in mining and quarrying, 90 per cent in finance, 75 per cent in hotels, 63 per cent in wholesale and retail, and 43 per cent in transport, communications and storage. Together these sectors accounted for 65 per cent of total turnover (ibid.:96). This clearly gives the lie to the claim that Indians control the Fiji economy.

Table 7.8 Sectoral Domination of Foreign Companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of Companies</th>
<th>% Share of Turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas and water</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>99.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>{179</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate and business services</td>
<td>{</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>{138</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and retail</td>
<td>{</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, communications &amp; storage</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community, social and personal services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the benefits which foreign investment brought, the Fiji economy has had to sustain outflows in the form of dividends, interest, royalties, payments for administrative services and so forth. Such outflows have been conservatively estimated at $28 million a year in the early 1980s, which is about 2 per cent of Gross National Product. Moreover, these figures do not take into account possible additional outflows through transfer pricing (Taylor 1987a:61).

By the 1980s foreign investment in Fiji was being reshaped as a result of international and local pressures but, as Taylor argues, foreign control of the Fiji economy did not decline. What changed was the nature of foreign involvement and control. Foreign companies either abandoned some sectors (e.g. W.R. Carpenter's withdrawal from copra processing), entered into joint ventures with local companies, moved more into sectors where they had better access to capital than their local rivals (e.g. the urban real estate market in Suva), or attempted to monopolize specific and well-defined sectors like chicken meat processing (ibid.:65).

An important factor behind the restructuring of foreign investment in Fiji was increased local competition. The expertise and ability of local entrepreneurs had grown but, very importantly, the Alliance government had also made substantial moves to expand local business. As the Economic Development Board put it in 1982:

Whilst welcoming overseas capital the Government is encouraging Fiji citizens to expand locally-owned enterprises and establish new ones;

The Government wants the skills and knowledge of Fiji citizens to improve, and their chances of taking part in the ownership and management of sound domestic and international business to expand;

The Government wishes to ensure that unnecessary competition from abroad does not discourage local investment;

Preference will be given to Fiji citizens in the setting up of new industries which they are capable of running (quoted, ibid.:62).

Increased local competition was therefore 'a fulfilment of Government policies and desires' but, significantly, it has also been ascribed to the political patronage of some now-large local enterprises (ibid.:64). What, then, is the character of the growing local bourgeoisie?
Taylor has identified three types of local enterprise: livelihood enterprises, which are tiny and are so labelled because they offer returns to their owners that differ little from what could be expected from wage employment; subcontractors, which are small and simply structured organizations whose productive potential is harnessed largely by foreign-owned firms; and locally-owned groups. The last of these are clearly the dominant fraction of the local bourgeoisie and Taylor's description of them is revealing:

Locally-owned groups in Fiji have an economic significance that far outweighs their [small] numbers. They obviously vary greatly in size and the more prominent companies in their ranks include Motibhai and Company, RV Patel, Punja and Sons, Tapoo Ltd, Lees Trading and GB Hari. They are multi-site operations that have highly centralised control and are usually family-owned. Most are owned by Indo-Fijians. Some are partnered by overseas companies in joint ventures, and a small number have themselves become multinational with overseas operations in Hong Kong and Australia for example. These are: "the new breed of flourishing local companies in Fiji, the kind moving in, taking over and then developing where oldtimers are dying off". (Islands Business, April 1984, p.40) A range of factors has promoted the growth of these locally-owned groups. Their greater age (29 years average in 1983) implies greater capital backing and established business and borrowing records. They are, therefore, in a position to occupy the niches vacated by foreign companies. They also have managerial expertise. As a result, these companies are well placed to partner foreign companies in joint ventures. Political patronage too, as has been suggested in the context of Mahendra Patel and his family group Motibhai and Company Ltd for example, can also play a significant part in the emergence of these groups (ibid.:70).

Simione Durutalo, a Fijian sociologist, also discusses political patronage in Fiji and refers to linkages between the Fijian-dominated Alliance state and capital, particularly foreign and local Indian capital, through directorships, joint ventures and financial support for the Alliance Party (Durutalo 1986). On directorships, he says that ‘most indigenous Fijian directors are appointed for their political influence and potential benefits they might bring to the corporation in the forms of contracts and licences obtained from the government’ (ibid.:36).

Such links further expose the class bias of the state, in particular its bias towards existing local, especially Indian, capital. Fijians could never hope to compete against large foreign companies, but against local Indian firms there was some chance of success. Yet even there, as
we shall see, any potential for Fijian success was seriously compromised by the class bias of the Alliance state, a class bias that undermined the very centrepiece of the Alliance's efforts to 'draw Fijians into business' — the Fijian soft loan scheme of the Fiji Development Bank.

There are, of course, many particular reasons for Fijian failure in business: insufficient discipline, lack of experience, unfamiliarity with business practice, the onerous demands of social and customary obligations and so on. At a broader level, however, there were structured factors which also limited the possibility of a Fijian bourgeoisie emerging: the small size of the economy, resource scarcity, the high level of foreign control, an existing domestic bourgeoisie dominated by Indian capital, and other established interests intent on preserving their interests. The capacity of the Fijian-dominated state to develop an indigenous Fijian bourgeoisie was therefore limited.

But so too was its willingness to do so, constrained as it was by its own class interests and biases. The class interests of the Fijian state bourgeoisie were strongly linked to those of its bourgeois allies, particularly foreign and local Indian capital. The Fijian clamour for 'more Fijians in business and commerce' was certainly heeded by the Alliance state. The realization of that goal, however, was highly problematic. But before looking at why and how the Alliance state failed in that task, we need to examine briefly the other side of this crucial class project — the control of labour — which again reveals the class bias of the Alliance state.

In order to 'secure the economic advancement of the Fijians', the Alliance needed more resources which, of course, would meant more taxes. That implied a higher level of economic activity, which in turn required business confidence, profitability and a stable environment. The converse of all this was the containment of labour. We have already described the forms of containment in the pre-independence period and the important developments of the 1960s. In the early 1970s, however, those efforts threatened to come unstuck.

By the time of independence, the contradictions which lay beneath the economic boom of the 1960s were beginning to surface. One early indicator was the worsening inflationary spiral. From an increase of 1.4 per cent in 1967, the consumer price index rose steadily and by 1970 registered an annual increase of 4.1 per cent. The Alliance government, barely six months old, realized that the upward trend would continue if it did not intervene. Consequently in April 1971 it introduced limited price controls. But that immediately provoked stinging attacks from capital, the Chambers of Commerce being particularly severe in their criticism. Two months later the Alliance government exposed its class bias and eased the price curbs. Prices rose again. By the end of 1971 the consumer price index had risen by
6.5 per cent and in 1972 it rose by another 9.5 per cent. Class tensions mounted. The working classes bore the brunt of higher costs and understandably became increasingly agitated. The number of strikes jumped from a low of 8 in 1970 to 47 in 1972 as more and more workers sought higher wages.

In April 1973 the state reacted by passing the Counter-Inflation Act and the highly repressive Trade Disputes Act. The stage was now set for a series of bitter struggles as capital and labour sought to defend their respective interests. There were 69 strikes and 116,998 lost workdays in 1973. However, the restraining influence of the Trade Disputes Act soon began to tell and the number of workdays lost fell to 83,332 in 1974 and 57,373 in 1975.

The Alliance government insisted that the act was not intended to undermine the workers’ right to strike but rather to improve the machinery for settling disputes and encourage dialogue. In 1974 the prime minister announced his intention to hold regular meetings with union leaders and employers. At its annual conference in December 1975 the FTUC (whose president, Mohammed Ramzan, had been elected to parliament on an Alliance Party ticket in the April 1972 elections) resolved to ask the prime minister to begin talks ‘for the development of a tripartite alliance for social-economic development and the spread of justice’ (Fiji Times 22 December 1975).

An alliance along similar lines already existed in Singapore and it is significant that the FTUC conference was addressed by Devan Nair the secretary-general of the Singapore Trade Union Congress. The FTUC, he suggested, might wish to consider the approach which his organization had taken to the ‘problems of socio-economic development and nation-building’.

In July 1976 the Fiji Employers Consultative Association pledged its support for the FTUC proposal for a ‘Singapore-style Government-employer-trade union council’. Later that year the state, FTUC and FECA formed the Tripartite Forum. With the unions now co-opted into the state machinery, the containment of class conflict became more institutionalized and manageable. What is more, the essentially petty bourgeois and reformist leadership of the trade union movement had close links with the ruling Alliance Party. Not surprisingly, as Table 7.9 below shows, the number of strikes and workdays lost generally declined.

With the new system of industrial relations, then, the Alliance state was better able to contain organized labour and so ensure a reasonably stable economic environment. Later we consider how the system came under increasing strain from the end of 1983, eventually being abandoned in 1986.
Table 7.9 Strike Activity 1977-1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of strikes</th>
<th>Workdays Lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>77,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>32,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>8,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2,877</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Ministry of Labour, Annual Reports; Kuruduadua, The Fiji Employers Consultative Association, p.31; Howard (1979:115).

For our present purposes, what is important is that it functioned reasonably effectively during that period when the Alliance state was ostensibly striving to advance Fijians economically. In that respect, the operation of the Tripartite Forum was an important counterpart to the Alliance's attempt to develop a Fijian bourgeoisie. With organized labour generally contained, a higher level of economic activity than otherwise possible was achieved, and so too a greater volume of state revenue. With more revenue, the state was, theoretically at least, better placed than it might otherwise have been to develop a Fijian bourgeoisie. But it failed to do so.

This brief overview of major economic developments since independence serves to underscore two crucial features of postcolonial Fiji, both of which bear directly on the capacity and willingness of the Alliance government to realize its crucial twin tasks of containing class tension and developing a Fijian bourgeoisie. The first is the continuing fragility of the economy - its smallness, external dependence and vulnerability. This imposes serious domestic and externally-determined limits on the capacity of the postcolonial state not only to deliver on its general promise of national development and multiracial harmony but also to advance Fijians economically and, more particularly, develop a Fijian bourgeoisie. The second crucial feature is the bourgeois character of the Alliance state. Its own class interests, together with its bias towards foreign and local (especially Indian) capital, were crucial determinants of the way it sought to deal with its key class projects.

In the face of these structural and class constraints, the particular task of developing a Fijian bourgeoisie proved difficult. Not only did the Alliance state have to appease its existing class allies but also the
limited scope for diversification was reduced even further by sluggish economic growth. What this meant was that the structural possibility for the emergence of a viable Fijian bourgeoisie became progressively less likely.

As we have seen, the most profitable areas for investment were not in agriculture but in industry and commerce; hence the attempt to draw Fijians into business. But even if that attempt were to succeed, the number of Fijians involved could not have been anything but small. On the other hand, the very presence of a successful Fijian business class — of a Fijian bourgeoisie — would at least have given some impression of Fijian economic advancement. And the myth of Indian economic dominance would have been dented. If there was some evidence of significant Fijian economic success, then Fijian concern about their economic disadvantage would be much less of a political problem for the Alliance. A prosperous Fijian race was clearly not possible. At a minimum, what was needed was a viable and functioning Fijian bourgeoisie.

**Fijian advancement, Fijian bourgeoisie: Alliance failure**

At the outset, the Alliance government announced its intention to get more Fijians involved in business. That meant raising Fijian educational standards and certain key recommendations contained in the 1969 report of the Fiji Education Commission formed the basis of subsequent state policy. One of these was that half of government scholarships be set aside for Fijians and the other half be given to students of other races. But other initiatives were clearly necessary, and among the possibilities considered were preferential loans from the FDB, the establishment of a special institute to train Fijians in business practices, the reservation of certain lines of goods for sale exclusively by Fijians (especially duty free goods), the setting up of more Fijian companies, and racial parity in the civil service. In May 1974 a cabinet subcommittee led by Prime Minister Mara was formed ‘to study ways of immediate and long term help to assist Fijians in the economic field’. Also in 1974 the commercial arm of the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB), the Native Land Development Corporation (NLDC), was formed to begin business ventures in property development, industry, agriculture, fishing and tourism.

Early in 1975 the cabinet subcommittee on Fijian economic development announced that directions would soon be given to the FDB to help Fijians with low-interest loans. The attack from capital followed soon after. Dick Warner, chairman of the Fiji Visitors Bureau, condemned the decision and the Suva Chamber of Commerce described the decision as ‘unfair’ and ‘discrimination of the first order’.
The government responded by saying that its action did not amount to favouritism. Most Fijians, it said, had no security loans and unlike people of other races could not turn to friends for help because they also had no money. They therefore had to be 'helped a little more into commerce'.

Of the economic initiatives undertaken by the Alliance government to help Fijians, financial assistance through the FDB was by far the largest and certainly the most important politically. With offices being opened in the major centres and loans being made to Fijians throughout the country, the FDB scheme soon became a highly visible form of direct assistance and helped to sustain Fijian political support for the Alliance. It created the appearance of an Alliance government committed to securing the economic advancement of the Fijians. What, then, was the FDB's record?

The first observation which can be made is that the Alliance government always professed its commitment to the development of agriculture and it complained continually about the commercial banks' bias against agricultural lending, a tendency which further disadvantaged Fijians. It is reasonable therefore to have expected the government to give prominence to agriculture in its own lending policy, especially as its lending capacity was tiny compared to that of commercial banks. (In 1985, for example, commercial banks lent $1,414 million, the FDB a mere $24 million). Yet between 1980 and 1985, the proportion of FDB funds lent to agriculture, fisheries and forestry fell from 47 per cent to 25 per cent.

Even with the bulk of FDB funds going to the commercial and industrial sectors, there was no guarantee that Fijians would benefit most. In the first five years of the preferential loan scheme, the number of commercial and industrial loans to Fijians rose from 130 to 403, peaking at 545 in 1979. But the benefit to Fijians was not as great as these figures suggest because Fijian loans were generally much smaller than the overall average. In fact, except in the year in which the scheme was introduced, their loans were less than half that of the overall average (see Table 7.10). Worse still, as a proportion of all loans, the value of loans to Fijians declined rapidly, falling from 80 per cent in 1975 to 27 per cent in 1979. Fijians got the greatest number of loans but non-Fijians got most of the money.

Because Fijians typically received less than others, they were less likely to become successful economic competitors. To make matters worse, the FDB allowed most of the money lent to Fijians to be invested in precisely those activities where existing capital was already well-established. In 1978 and 1979, for example, most of the FDB money lent to Fijians was spent in the transport sector (FDB Annual Reports 1979, 1980).
Table 7.10  FDB Commercial and Industrial Loans to Fijians 1975-1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Loans</th>
<th>% of Fijian Loans</th>
<th>Av. size Loans ($)</th>
<th>Av. size for all Loans</th>
<th>(C)/(D)</th>
<th>Value of Loans as % of Total Loan Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>7,670</td>
<td>12,739</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>5,368</td>
<td>11,020</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>4,374</td>
<td>11,549</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5,153</td>
<td>13,039</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>4,833</td>
<td>12,961</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Observation suggests that much of that money was invested in bus and taxi transportation. These activities were already dominated by Indian entrepreneurs who were highly unlikely to yield easily to Fijian competition. Evidence of this was the failure of the Rewa Provincial Development Company which was involved in bus transportation. But in commerce too, the second largest area of FDB lending to Fijians, competition from established businesses, particularly Indian ones, was stiff.

By the end of the 1970s the attempt to develop Fijian business - to develop a Fijian bourgeoisie - showed little sign of succeeding and in 1979 the Alliance government sought to rectify this by setting up the Business Opportunity and Management Advisory Service (BOMAS). But that did little to improve Fijian fortunes. Even the larger and more highly publicized ventures failed to create anything like a strong Fijian business presence. Examples include the Cakaudrove Bua Macuata Group, Yatulau Company, the Tailevu Provincial Dairy Company, Kubuna Holdings, the Macuata Provincial Development Company, and the two on which so much Fijian hopes had been pinned, the Fijian Investments and Development Corporation which was formed back in 1969 and the NLDC. The NLDC was created in 1975 to increase Fijian business involvement through the development of native land in urban and peri-urban areas. One of its major projects was to increase Fijian participation in sugarcane production and the centrepiece of its effort in that regard was the Seaqaqa Sugarcane Extension Scheme. By 1977,
491 Fijian canefarmers had been established under that scheme with the help of soft loans from the FDB. In 1985, however, the deputy prime minister and minister for Fijian Affairs, Ratu David Toganivalu, reported NLDC losses amounting to some $9 million (Durutalo 1986:55).

By the early 1980s, then, Fijian business failure had become increasingly apparent and fresh appeals for more state assistance were made. Apisai Tora called for an 'advisory unit' to encourage more Fijians into commerce and Ratu Meli Loki pleaded in the Senate for 'a crash education and economic programm to help launch Fijians in business. The suggestions were not taken up. Instead the Alliance government continued to rely largely on its existing programmes, and in particular its Fijian soft loan scheme through the FDB. But the evidence of the 1970s had cast doubts on the effectiveness of the scheme. The grounds for such scepticism were strengthened by the experience of the 1980s. This particular attempt by the Fijian-dominated Alliance Government to develop a Fijian bourgeoisie was failing.

Table 7.11 Percentages of FDB Commercial and Industrial Loans Given to Fijians 1978-1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As Table 7.11 shows the proportionate decline in the 1970s in both the number and value of commercial and industrial loans to Fijians continued into the 1980s. By 1985 Fijians still received most of the loans but their proportion of the total had fallen from 71 per cent in 1978 to 52 per cent. However, the proportionate decrease in the value of those loans was worse — from a meagre 28 per cent to a pitiful 8 per cent over the same period. Little wonder that Fijians became doubtful. Another way of presenting this worsening situation is to make direct comparisons between loans to Fijians and loans to non-Fijians. The figures are presented in Table 7.12 below.

The increase in the number of loans given to Fijians yields a positive image of the FDB’s preferential scheme. But in fact, not only did Fijians receive far less than non-Fijian, the gap continued to widen, so that by 1985 non-Fijians received eleven times as much as Fijians.
Table 7.12 FDB Commercial and Industrial Loan by Race 1978-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number Fijians</th>
<th>Number Non-Fijians</th>
<th>Value Fijians</th>
<th>Value Non-Fijians</th>
<th>Ratio (C)/(D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Beneath this broad picture of unmistakeable bias lies an even more telling one. Table 7.13 below shows that across economic sectors the average size of loans to non-Fijians was generally several times greater than those given to Fijians. But two particular features are especially significant. First, except in relation to transportation, the gap in average loan size tended to worsen after 1980. And secondly, the bias against Fijian borrowers was generally greater in respect of loans for investment in tourism than in other industries. The peak came in 1984 when the ratio between Fijians and non-Fijians was 1 to 93! The economic sector in which Fijians had hoped so much to succeed, therefore, was the very one in which they were most heavily discriminated against under the FDB lending scheme. Furthermore, it was also the industry in which the FDB was least willing to assist Fijians.

As Table 7.13 shows, only 2 per cent of industrial loans to Fijians were for investment in tourism. Significantly, the FDB continued with its longstanding lending bias towards the transportation and commercial sectors, precisely those areas where existing competition was well established. The relative decline in transportation loans is notable but what is more interesting is that it resulted from the FDB’s rather belated ‘cautious attitude...due to suspicions of saturation’ (Fiji Development Bank, Annual Report 1985/86:27). On the other hand, the value of commercial loans to Fijians rose from 33 per cent of total
lending in 1980 to 62 per cent in 1985. Rather than using its resources to increase Fijian involvement in tourism or real productive activity, the

Table 7.13 FDB Commercial and Industrial Loans to Fijians, by Sector, 1980-1985 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction &amp;</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manufacturing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


FDB instead concentrated even more on relatively unproductive commercial loans:

[t]he Bank has reformulated new guidelines that allow for the refinancing of commercial buildings. These refinancing proposals have contributed to the high proportion in number and value of loan approvals in this sub-sector (ibid.:28).

The proportionate value of commercial and industrial loans to Fijians for investment in tourism never rose beyond 2 per cent. With such meagre assistance, how could Fijians ever hope to draw more benefits from tourism? And that they got only the crumbs has been well demonstrated by research conducted by Britton in 1977. There is no evidence that the situation has improved very much since.

The distribution of gross tourism receipts for 1977 is shown above in Table 7.14. Foreign enterprises got the most (75.8 per cent), Fijian ones the least (0.5 per cent). But the 8.2 per cent received by local Indian enterprises is also significant because it contradicts the view that Indians dominate the economy. That, and the poor performance of Fijians, can be elaborated. As Table 7.15 shows, the great bulk of tourism revenue is generated in the accommodation and tourist shopping subsectors (44 per cent and 35 per cent respectively). Travel and tours account for only 19 per cent and handicrafts a mere 2 per cent.
Table 7.14 Distribution of Tourist Receipts by Ownership of Enterprises, 1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership Category</th>
<th>% of Total Turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas owned enterprises</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji owned enterprises:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. tourist expenditure</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government revenues</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 7.15 Subsectoral Composition of Tourism Receipts, 1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourism Subsector</th>
<th>$ million</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist shopping</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel and tours</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>72.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 7.16 shows that the three most lucrative subsectors - accommodation, tourist shopping, and travel and tours — were dominated by foreign capital. Local white capital ranked second in travel and tours, and local Indian capital in tourist shopping. Fijian enterprises fared worst, most of their tourism earning coming from the least lucrative subsector - handicraft sales. Clearly, therefore, by far the greatest share of tourism earnings went to foreign enterprises and the smallest to Fijian.
Fijian state power - for Fijians or the ruling class?

Table 7.16  Ownership and Distribution of Turnover in Fiji Tourist Industry, 1977 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsectors</th>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Tourist shopping</th>
<th>Travel &amp; tours</th>
<th>Handicrafts enterprises</th>
<th>% of all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 7.17 Tourism Enterprises by Subsector and Ownership, 1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Accommodation no.</th>
<th>Tourist Shopping %</th>
<th>Travel &amp; Tours no.</th>
<th>Handicrafts %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it is true that in the tourist industry Indian firms fare better than Fijian firms, it is certainly not the case that they dominate Fiji’s second largest industry. What appears to many as Indian dominance and control is in fact Indian numerical preponderance, especially in highly visibly activities like retailing generally and duty free sales in particular. This preponderance is clearly shown in Table 7.17. In 1977 91 per cent of enterprises in the tourist shopping subsector were Indian. But as Table 7.16 shows, they received only 25.9 per cent of revenue from tourist shopping. Table 7.17 further underlines the disadvantaged position of Fijians in the tourist industry. They certainly dominated handicraft sales but such activity accounted for a mere 2 per cent of total tourism revenue.

Clearly, then, Fijian performance in the tourist industry was dismal, but that was typical of the broader pattern of Fijian business failure. The attempt by the Alliance state to draw Fijians into business — to develop a Fijian bourgeoisie — had failed. And, as we have seen, a major reason for the failure was that the centrepiece of the whole exercise — the FDB’s Fijian soft loan scheme — was imperiled from the outset by an anti-Fijian bias which in turn was the product of the Alliance’s class bias in favour of existing capital, particularly foreign and local Indian capital. Little wonder therefore that Alliance policy and practice came to be viewed with increasing Fijian suspicion.

Such suspicion was bound to have political consequences for the Alliance and nowhere was this more clearly evident than in the conflict over the processing of Fiji pine - a conflict which was all the more important for its regional character.

The planting of *Pinus caribbea* began in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Most of the pine was grown in western Viti Levu. In 1976 the government, together with the landowning mataqali in the pine-growing areas, formed the Fiji Pine Commission (FPC) to oversee the development of the industry and soon afterwards tenders were called for the harvesting and processing of mature pine. Tenders were received from the M.K. Hunt Foundation, Shell New Zealand Forest Products, British Petroleum Southwest Pacific Limited (BP), and the United Marketing Company (UMC) which was owned by an American businessman, Sandblom.

The FPC accepted BP’s tender on the grounds that it was more flexible and promised rational management of the industry. The landowners, led by Ratu Osea Gavidi, a chief from Nadroga, favoured the UMC proposal because it ‘apparently recognised legitimate landowner rights, offered them a greater share of the profits, and allowed participation at all levels of the industry’ (Lal 1986a:99). The FPC refused to budge and the government declared Sandblom a prohibited immigrant. Thereafter the conflict worsened as landowners
resisted the FPC and boycotted several FPC pine planting programmes. Eventually, however, the FPC won.

A major consequence of the struggle over Fiji's 'green gold' was the formation in July 1981 of a new political party, the Western United Front (WUF). The WUF saw the government's actions as interference in the right of western Fijians to utilize their resources according to their wishes. Many wanted a decentralized pine industry because such an arrangement held more promise of real benefits for them. The state, however, preferred more centralized control. As far as the Alliance state was concerned, Fijian economic advancement would be pursued so long as its own interests were not offended.

For the vast majority of Fijians, then, the hope of economic advancement under Alliance rule remained unfulfilled. Even the minimal class project of drawing Fijians into business and thus developing a Fijian bourgeoisie had failed. It is not surprising, therefore, that Fijian support for the Alliance became shaky, and in the next chapter we will examine the political consequences of this.

Classes and racial fear

At the level of appearance, there are understandable grounds for the Fijian fear of being dominated by Indians. Outside of the subsistence sector, the two major economic areas in which Fijians are most frequently involved on a daily basis are retail trade and ground transportation. And it is precisely these areas which are most heavily dominated by Indians. Both in the urban and in the rural areas, Indians control the majority of retail outlets. They also operate the vast majority of buses and taxis. For a sizeable part of their daily requirements, therefore, Fijians rely greatly on local Indian capitalists. And out of this daily experience emerges an understandable fear and resentment. Unfortunately, capitalist Indian success is often mistakenly seen as Indian success, for as we shall see presently, the vast majority of Indians, like the vast majority of Fijians, belong to the working classes.

Fijian fears are further aggravated by the poor performance of Fijians relative to Indians (and other races) in education and employment. Academic underachievement has long been a source of Fijian anxiety and recent evidence shows that it continues to be a problem (Cole and Hughes 1988:30). There are many reasons for this, not least of which are the differences in socio-economic backgrounds and study environments. Equally, however, there is merit in the

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2 For a detailed study of the pine dispute and the WUF see Durutalo (1985).
argument that the pattern of differential achievement is due in large part to differential application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.18 White Collar Employment By Race, 1986</th>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional and managerial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,266</td>
<td>9,023</td>
<td>1,765</td>
<td>13,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(17.4%)</td>
<td>(69.1%)</td>
<td>(13.5%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>officials</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judges &amp; lawyers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professionals</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General managers</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>1,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production managers</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other managers</td>
<td>1,426</td>
<td>7,149</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>9,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9,707</td>
<td>1,4901</td>
<td>2,796</td>
<td>27,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(35.4%)</td>
<td>(54.4%)</td>
<td>(10.2%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State officials</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>2,889</td>
<td>4,098</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>7,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>1,606</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>2,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales reps</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3,674</td>
<td>7,142</td>
<td>1,568</td>
<td>12,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White collar workers</td>
<td>7,348</td>
<td>12,6190</td>
<td>2,060</td>
<td>22,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.4%)</td>
<td>(57.3%)</td>
<td>(9.3%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total white collar</td>
<td>19,321</td>
<td>36,543</td>
<td>6,621</td>
<td>62,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.9%)</td>
<td>(58.5%)</td>
<td>(10.6%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1986 Census.
Academic success does not guarantee better employment, and often personal or family connections or other factors are more important. But it certainly helps, so it is not altogether surprising that higher-level, better-paid, and white collar jobs tend to be dominated by Indians. This is borne out by Table 7.18 which shows that in 1986 Indians held 58.5 per cent of all white collar jobs and 69.1 per cent of professional and managerial jobs. The corresponding figures for Fijians were 30.9 per cent and 17.4 per cent.

With Indians being so visibly dominant in highly-paid, professional, managerial and other white collar occupations, the deepening sense of Fijian disadvantage is even more understandable. For not only did they dominate those economic activities which impacted daily and most directly on Fijian lives, they also commanded the most sought after jobs. Clearly, then, there are grounds for the Fijian envy of Indians. But therein lies the problem. Fijians generally perceive the cause of their legitimate grievance in racial terms. In their eyes the problem is a racial one: Indian success, Fijian failure. We argue, however, that the problem is also, indeed primarily, a class one. This is not to deny the force of racist sentiment in Fiji, and in particular the enormous influence of racial stereotyping, but rather to argue that there is a material basis - a class basis - to racism which needs to be recognized. When, for example, Fijians sneer at an Indian businessman, it is out of resentment and envy. He is resented because he is an Indian (as opposed to, say, a European). But he is certainly not envied for being Indian. Rather, he is envied because he is a businessman. The envy has to do primarily with class not race, even if the resentment might spring from both. Unfortunately, the racial form of the problem invariably hides its class content. And this helps to sustain the myth of Indian domination. For the reality is that most Indians, like most Fijians, belong to the lower classes.

In the 1986 census, people who were economically active were asked to indicate whether or not they were in paid employment. Those who were in paid employment were asked to describe their occupation and also to indicate whether they were self-employed, employed in the public sector, or employed in the the private sector. The results are summarised in Table 7.19.

Several important features about Table 7.19 may be noted. First, Indians account for the largest proportion of paid employment - 54.1 per cent, compared with 40.1 per cent for Fijians and 5.8 per cent for other races. Conversely, Fijians make up the vast majority of those without paid employment: 69.3 per cent compared with 25.2 per cent for Indians and 5.5 per cent for other races. Secondly, Indians dominate the professional, managerial and middle level occupations, but they also make up the majority of lower level workers (white collar,
blue collar and rural workers). Thirdly, Fijians make up the vast majority of farmers, including subsistence farmers, while most unpaid family workers are Indian.

**Table 7.19  Economically Active Population By Race 1986**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; managerial</td>
<td>2,266</td>
<td>9,023</td>
<td>1,765</td>
<td>13,054</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level</td>
<td>9,707</td>
<td>14,901</td>
<td>2,796</td>
<td>27,404</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower level:</td>
<td>42,708</td>
<td>59,743</td>
<td>5,706</td>
<td>108,517</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Workers**
- White collar
- Blue collar
- Rural

**Farmers**

**Total in paid employment**

**Employable but Without paid Jobs**

**Subsistence farmers**
- Unpaid family workers
- Seeking employment

**TOTAL**

*Source: 1986 Census.*

Taken together, these features are important because they cut across the racial dichotomy of Indian dominance/Fijian disadvantage. Above all else, they show that although Indians dominate higher and middle level occupations the numbers involved are very small. The
majority of economically active Indians either have lower-level jobs or are not in paid employment. The same is true of most Fijians. This points, of course, to the heavy concentration of Fijians and Indians in the lower classes.

To construct a picture of the Fiji class structure, the census figures on occupation were reclassified on the basis of the more detailed descriptions of occupations. The picture is presented in Table 7.20.3

The class sizes are reasonably close to what might be expected. The ruling class is small and comprises the foreign and local bourgeoisie, the Fijian-dominated state bourgeoisie (which includes cabinet ministers, permanent secretaries, directors, and heads of parastatal organizations) and the chiefly elite. The sizeable middle class is also to be expected and includes doctors, technicians, teachers and middle-ranking civil servants. The petty bourgeoisie consists of those in small, owner-operated enterprises which hire little or no wage labour and instead rely largely on family labour. It is often referred to as the informal sector and is probably larger than the figure of 6.5 per cent suggests.

The figure of 44.8 per cent for the working class is more an indication of the large mass of working people in Fiji than of a large industrial working class.

Any such exercise is of course plagued with enormous difficulties. Did individuals accurately describe their occupations? If they worked for a private firm, was it large? Small? Family-owned? Did their jobs involve managerial, supervisory or other control functions? If so, how much? Were they full-time, part-time or casual workers? What about their income level, level of education, place of residence, value of assets, membership of political and social organizations? How many farmers were engaged in full-time commercial farming? How many owned large farms? How many hired wage labour, and how much?

Then there is the problem that the database is the economically active population, which in 1986 represented only 34 per cent of the total population, although here we rely on the defensible assumption that members of a household generally belong to the same class.

These and other problems are acknowledged and a better picture of the Fiji class structure must await further research. The class structure presented here is a first attempt. The occupational descriptions were reasonable and together with personal knowledge of Fiji allowed recategorization into classes
Table 7.20  Fiji Class Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruling class</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty bourgeoisie</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class:</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white collar</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blue collar</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rural</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve army</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Employable but without paid jobs:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasantry</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid family workers</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking employment</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Economically Active Population  100.0

The figure of 21.8 per cent for blue collar workers is a better indication of the latter. The considerable number of rural workers, together with the sizeable farming class, underlines the importance of the rural sector. But it is important to note that many rural workers are hired on a part-time, casual or seasonal basis, as sugarcane cutters for example. Finally, the very large reserve army is not unsurprising. The reserve army refers to those who are employable but do not have paid jobs, and of these the largest group by far is the peasantry. The peasantry comprise those who engage in production primarily for subsistence but who might also sell some of their produce. A highly significant feature of the peasantry in Fiji is that the vast majority (85.6 per cent) are Fijians.

With this picture of the class structure, it is now possible to see more clearly the class basis of racial antagonism. The racial composition of classes is presented in Table 7.21 and illustrated in the diagram below.
Table 7.21 Racial Composition of Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruling/dominant class</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty bourgeoisie</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class - white collar</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- blue collar</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rural</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve army - peasantry</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- others</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diagram: Race and Class in Fiji
In Table 7.21 and the diagram above the ruling class is referred to as the ruling/dominant class primarily to underline the political dominance of the Fijian-dominated state bourgeoisie, the eastern-dominated chiefly elite and (since 1987) the military, despite their small size and economic weakness. Of course, the other outstanding feature, as indicated by the diagram, is the absence of a Fijian bourgeoisie. The disproportionately high number of other races in the ruling/dominant class not only reflects their success in high-level occupations, it also indicates the presence of foreign corporations whose control over the commanding heights of the economy we described earlier in this chapter.

The high Indian representation in the ruling/dominant class reflects Indian preponderance in the local bourgeoisie. It is that, together with the Indian preponderance in the middle class and the petty bourgeoisie, which lies at the heart of anti-Indian sentiment. Indian overrepresentation in these classes, in other words, represents the class foundations of anti-Indian feeling. In that regard, Indian preponderance in the petty bourgeoisie merits special mention.

Typically smalltime, family-based, petty commodity producers, the Indian petty bourgeoisie are particularly susceptible to racial stereotyping. Hamstrung by limited resources, and often by large families, they work long and hard and exercise great frugality. To many observers, including Fijians, this is seen as obsession with making money; frugality is seen as meanness, *mamaqi* in Fijian. But it is only through sacrifice and discipline that such Indians survive, and sometimes even succeed. Of course, the negative perception described here may be warranted in some cases, but that is equally true of non-Indians. What is certainly unjustifiable is the wholesale stereotyping in that way of Indians as a race. Yet this is precisely what has happened.

It began in the colonial period when white capital, especially local white capital, used it as a device to control the Indian working masses and counteract competition from the emerging local Indian bourgeoisie. In that task it secured the support of the chiefly class, especially eastern chiefs; soon anti-Indian sentiment began to pervade the Fijian community. In the transition to independence the ruling class, and most especially the chiefly elite, introduced the ideology of multiracialism in order to facilitate Fijian state power in the postcolonial period. With that secured, and so long as the Fijian-dominated Alliance Party enjoyed political dominance, the ideology of multiracialism held firm. Beneath this outward ideological hegemony, however, lay a deep-rooted racism nurtured by racist socialization processes and continually reinforced by racialist constructions of class difference of the types described above.

However, as our discussion in this chapter has revealed, there is a major disjunction between the Fijian perception of Indian economic
dominance and the realities of the situation. Indians appear to be economically dominant because they have the highest number of high level, middle level and white collar jobs and because they account for the largest number of capitalists. But number does not necessarily equal power, and as we have seen, it is foreign capital which wields economic power.

But there is another side to this gap between myth and reality which is equally if not more important. Against the misguided Fijian perception of Indian economic dominance stands the fact that the vast majority of Indians (89 per cent), like the majority of Fijians (79 per cent) belong to the disadvantaged classes — the farmers, wage workers, the peasantry, unpaid family workers and the unemployed. Unfortunately, the consuming strength and pervasiveness of anti-Indian sentiment has been such that their common predicament as oppressed and disadvantaged people has not always found expression in sustained, organized and united struggle. For the greater part of Fiji history since the arrival of Europeans and Indians, racist ideology and practice, coupled with persistent Fijian loyalty to tradition and chiefly authority, proved far too enduring and divisive. Until, that is the latter half of the 1980s when the politics of race began to show real signs of being fundamentally breached.

Having borne the brunt of prolonged economic recession, the working classes became more restless and assertive. Very importantly, the Alliance had failed Fijian hopes that it would advance their economic interests. The development of a Fijian bourgeoisie would have provided at least some evidence of Fijian business success, but even that minimal project the Alliance did not achieve. With mounting class tension and growing Fijian disaffection, then, greater unity among the working classes became possible. And with the formation of the Fiji Labour Party to consolidate this new alignment of class forces, the stage was set for the defeat of the Alliance Party. Shocked, and in the name of ‘Fijian paramountcy’, representatives of the eastern-dominated chiefly elite and the Fijian state bourgeoisie orchestrated a destabilization campaign which led to the coups of 1987 and their subsequent return to power. For the working masses, the promise of a ‘better tomorrow’ was not to be. As we turn now to that sad story we begin by tracing the Alliance’s growing crisis of legitimacy.
Chapter 8

Crises, Coups and the Republic

From the very outset, the viability of the Alliance state rested on contradictory class foundations. On the one hand it needed the economic support of the capitalist class (foreign and local capital), while on the other it needed the political support of a large section of the disadvantaged classes — wage workers, farmers, peasants and the unemployed. In particular, it depended for its political survival on Fijians and general electors in the lower classes. Racialist ideology and practice have ensured, however, that these power bases are seen in racial terms - Fijians and general electors for the Alliance; and Indians for the NFP.

Certainly there is evidence which seems to bear out the racialist orthodoxy. Our argument, however, is that racialist explanations hide a deeper class reality and in this chapter we will try to demonstrate this further. The test case, of course, is the situation in post-coup Fiji where the ‘Indian factor’ has been weakened/contained/neutralized and yet there is no Fijian unity. Instead what we find is open tension and struggle among Fijians. How is this to be explained? Why are Fijians fighting Fijians? The racialist orthodoxy cannot explain this.

What is more, it would be ludicrous to suggest that the intra-Fijian antagonisms we are now witnessing have their origins in the post-coup period. They do not, as previous chapters have clearly shown. They lie deep in Fiji’s history. The difficulty is that they have been suppressed or masked by racial forms of social conflict. Only now, with the Indians removed, so to speak, from the race equation, do we see underlying causes more clearly. Some of those causes have to do with aspects which are unique to intra-Fijian relations — chief/commoner relations, regional antagonisms between east and west, traditional political alignments, and so on. But at the broader level of Fiji society as a whole, they have to do fundamentally with class.

In previous chapters we showed how in the colonial era these tensions periodically became manifest and, more importantly, how they were contained. We now extend that exercise into the postcolonial period and thus further expose the mystifying, and therefore ideological, role of the racialist orthodoxy. Focussing on broad political
developments, we approach the task through an examination of the problem of the legitimacy of the state.

We will argue that from the mid 1970s the Alliance state was faced with an increasingly serious problem of legitimacy which deepened in the mid 1980s when economic conditions worsened. In that situation emerged the Fiji Labour Party. The party's denial of racial politics and criticism of the Alliance for perpetuating it represented a major breach of racist politics in Fiji. That, coupled with its commitment to the plight of 'the poor, the weak and the disadvantaged' captured the imagination of the underclasses who now looked with hope to the party's promise of 'a brighter tomorrow'. Loyalties began to shift, and the demise of the Alliance gathered pace.

The biggest losers in the Alliance's defeat in April 1987 were the eastern-dominated chiefly elite and the Fijian state bourgeoisie. Their representatives therefore quickly set about a destabilization campaign which would lead to military intervention and their subsequent reinstatement to power, ostensibly impelled by a concern for 'the paramountcy of Fijian interests'. This whole process marked the return of racist politics, but this time in more virulent, violent and pernicious forms than ever before.

But the racist regime has not delivered on its promise of 'Fiji for the Fijians'; indeed it cannot, organized as it is around the interests of a privileged minority backed by the barrel of the gun. And now that disadvantaged Fijians are increasingly showing signs of discontent, the regime is becoming worried, indeed desperate, as we shall see below.

Crisis of legitimacy: alliance in decline

Because electoral outcomes are a major empirical basis for our discussion, it is necessary briefly to describe the electoral system under the 1970 constitution. There were 52 single-member constituencies contested on the basis of simple majorities. Constituencies were of two types: communal and national, of which there were 27 and 25 respectively. Each type was in turn composed of separate Fijian, Indian and general elector constituencies, the numbers of which are shown in Table 8.1 below.

Communal constituencies were racially exclusive, so that only Fijians could vote in and be candidates for Fijian communal seats, and similarly for Indians and general electors in respect of their communal seats. Voters cast one vote for a communal candidate. National constituencies, on the other hand, were not racially exclusive in that they included voters of all races. However, voters elected three national candidates — one Fijian, one Indian, and one general elector. This is the so-called cross-voting system.
Table 8.1  Electoral Constituencies Under the 1970 Constitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>General Elector</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communal Seats</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Seats</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The operation of the electoral system is perhaps best illustrated by way of example. A Fijian voter cast four votes: one communal vote (for a Fijian candidate) and three national votes (one for a Fijian, one for an Indian, and one for a general elector candidate).

The clearest indication of party support is the communal vote, and the distribution of communal votes in each of the post-independence national elections is shown in Table 8.2.

The figures clearly show the dominance of the major political parties and also the strong racial pattern of voting behaviour — overwhelming Fijian and general elector support for the Alliance, and overwhelming Indian support for the NFP.

Table 8.2 Ethnic Voting Pattern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communal Votes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fijian for Alliance</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>83.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General elector for Alliance</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian for NFP</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Lal (1986b:90); Robertson and Tamanisau (1988:60).

But there is further evidence to suggest that the Alliance's crisis of legitimacy worsened over the years - the general decline in the Alliance's parliamentary majority. (See Table 8.3.)
This would seem to lend considerable support to the orthodoxy about the primacy of race. Against that, however, several points can be made. The first is the obvious one that the racial pattern of voting is in large part the product of the electoral system. Secondly, although the voting pattern is strongly racial, there is a noticeable and highly suggestive difference between Indian and Fijian voting patterns. While Indian support for the NFP has remained high, Fijian support for the Alliance has fluctuated. Indeed, in the second general elections, held in April 1977, Fijian support for the Alliance fell to its all-time low. It subsequently improved but ten years later it fell again. This suggests that by the mid 1970s the Alliance state was faced with a serious problem of legitimacy.

Table 8.3 Alliance Parliamentary Majorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order better to understand the underlying causes of the Alliance's crisis of legitimacy, we will examine the key issues in the five national elections. Our concern is not so much with the details of the elections but rather with underlying tendencies. Several general factors account for the Alliance's resounding victory in 1972: the euphoria of independence was still in the air; the economy was reasonably healthy; Ratu Mara commanded immense prestige both as a high chief, a moderate, and a statesman; and the party was well-organized. Also important was the pro-Alliance leanings of the FTUC leadership. The two men who led the labour movement from the early 1960s, Mohammed Ramzan (president) and Sakeasi Waqanivavalagi (secretary) successfully contested the elections as Alliance candidates and subsequently became ministers. Into their shoes stepped two other pro-Alliance men, Joveci Gavoka and James Raman.

By 1973, however, the Alliance's honeymoon period was over as the contradictions of the neocolonial economy began to surface. Between July 1973 and October 1973 prices rose by 15 per cent.

1 For studies of the elections see Chick (1973); Ali (1972, 1977); Premdas (1979); and Lal (1983).
(Leckie 1988:139) and the government's attempt to curb the upward trend through the Counterinflation Act of 1973 weakened the position of workers even more. A wage freeze lasted until June 1973 and over the next six months wage bargaining had to be conducted around a guideline of 8 per cent set by the Alliance. The class tensions which this created were fuelled by the highly repressive Trade Disputes Act of 1973, and the oil price rises of late 1973/early 1974 made matters worse. Of course the rural sector, where Fijians were most heavily concentrated, was especially hard hit. In addition to having to pay higher prices than urban dwellers, there were limited opportunities for paid employment and many were dependent on outside incomes.

It was in that difficult situation that Sakeasi Butadroka, assistant minister for Commerce and Industry, launched his attack on the Alliance government for not doing enough for Fijians. He was promptly dismissed from his post and the party, but remained in parliament as an independent and turned his energies to forming the Fijian Nationalist Party in 1974. Butadroka's primary concern was Fijian economic disadvantage, an issue which figured prominently in the lead-up to independence but then was neglected by the Alliance. His intervention in 1973 brought the issue back into the open and forced the Alliance state into action.

Attacked by one of its own members for neglecting its power base, the Alliance was forced into doing more to advance Fijian economic interests, and in particular to draw more Fijians into business. Essentially, the Alliance sought to develop a Fijian bourgeoisie. The showpiece of its efforts was the Fijian soft loan scheme, which showed little sign of succeeding by the time of the second national elections in April 1977 (see chapter 7). The only Fijians who seemed to be doing well were those in the Fijian state bourgeoisie and a handful of (primarily eastern) chiefs. Increasing resentment of this fact among the Fijian masses provided fertile ground for Butadroka and the FNP. Before developing this point, however, we need to consider what the FNP saw as the other cause of 'Fijian economic backwardness'.

Like many others, Butadroka blamed the Indians, invariably comparing 'Fijian' economic failure with 'Indian' economic success. The local Indian bourgeoisie was flourishing and Indians dominated the professions and other high-level occupations in both the public and private sectors. Indians were therefore seen as dominating the economy, and in 1975 when changes to the terms of leases of native land were proposed Butadroka found another opportunity to intensify his attack on Indians.

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2 For 1976 figures on this see Sutherland (1984: chapter XI).
The distribution of land ownership in Fiji is shown in Table 8.4. Collectively owned by mataqali, Fijian native land is inalienable. Most of the freehold land is owned by Europeans. Indians make up more than 80 per cent of sugarcane farmers, and most Indians lease native land.

Table 8.4 Land Distribution in Fiji

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native land</td>
<td>3,714,000</td>
<td>82.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freehold land</td>
<td>368,000</td>
<td>8.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown land</td>
<td>377,000</td>
<td>9.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotuman land</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Indian farmers had long been concerned about the security of their native leases and persistent pressure led to a 1975 report which recommended, among other things, a minimum lease period of 30 years with a further extension of 20 years. A Bill to amend the existing legislation was introduced in October 1975 and passed in November 1976 as the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (ALTA).

Within the Indian tenant community there were two views of the bill: one saw it as the best that could be expected in the circumstances, the other that it simply extended existing uncertainties. In parliament in November 1976, the Alliance supported the bill; the next elections were due in the following year. The NFP opposition, on the other hand, split on the issue and thus allowed the Alliance to secure the 75 per cent vote in the House of Representatives required by the 1970 constitution. The faction led by NFP leader Siddiq Koya opposed the bill while the faction led by Karam Ramrakha and Irene Narayan supported it. The Alliance dominated the Senate and so had little difficulty meeting the other constitutional requirements relating to changes affecting Fijian land — a 75 per cent Senate vote plus the votes of at least 6 of the 8 Senate nominees of the Council of Chiefs.

For Butadroka, the new act represented yet another example of Indian gain. The former cooperatives’ officer, who had spent a great deal of time with grassroots Fijians, particularly in the rural areas, was well attuned to Fijian feelings. When the bill was first introduced in October 1975 he moved a motion in parliament for the repatriation of Fiji Indians to India. Although unsuccessful, it appears that the motion
expressed a sentiment widely held by Fijians. As even the deputy prime minister at the time, Ratu David Toganivalu, reportedly put it:

Ethnic feeling or rivalry is very real. One must be very honest in saying that all Fijians consciously, but mainly unconsciously, feel at times...what is expressed in the motion; this is how we feel at times; at certain moments, in times of anger, this is what we say (quoted in Ali 1977:194).

Soon after the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act was passed in November 1976, Butadroka renewed his call for the repatriation of Indians and in December 1976 made it a central part of the FNP's manifesto for the forthcoming elections. It was to be a factor in Butadroka's success.

But it was the anti-Alliance thrust of the FNP's campaign which was far more important. The party's critical message was that the Alliance was supposed to advance Fijian interests but had failed to do so and that only the small Fijian elite had benefitted under Alliance rule. And the fact that the FNP won 11.6 per cent of the Fijian communal vote showed that at least some sections of the Fijian masses were becoming aware of and disgruntled by intra-Fijian class differences. As one FNP election handout put it:

The only Fijians who seem to be getting ahead are those who do not do any useful work, these are the 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"] (quoted in ibid.).

The class message here is unmistakeable: Alliance rule had done little for the vast majority of ordinary Fijians. Chiefs and the Fijian state bourgeoisie had benefitted but not Fijian workers and peasants. And it was the latter which the FNP had in mind when it said:

Fijians are far behind as regards owning those things which stand as symbols for social and economic development, eg, bus, house, car, telephone and industries. This is due to the weakness and blindness of the Alliance Government (quoted in ibid.).

Unfortunately, the nascent class awareness indicated by this statement was swamped by racist sentiment, and ten years later the FNP's extremist brand of Fijian nationalism would be used to justify the destabilization and overthrow of the democratically-elected Bavadra government. The FNP's manifesto for the April 1977 elections foreshadowed with chilling accuracy many of the extremist demands implemented ten years later in the racist Republic:
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 into 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 sold illegally. (Ibid.:190).

The FNP struck a chord with disadvantaged Fijians and in the April 1977 elections Fijian support for the Alliance fell by 18.7 per cent to an all-time low of 64.7 per cent. Butadroka won the Rewa/Serua/Namosi Fijian communal seat, and in the western region Ratu Osea Gavidi, standing as an independent, won the Nadroga/Navosa Fijian communal seat. Disaffection among the Fijian masses was dramatically demonstrated.

But the Alliance also miscalculated its Indian support. What gains it might have expected as a result of the ALTA was negated by one of its education policies which became publicly known only one month before the elections. The Alliance government had decided that to be eligible for a scholarship to undertake a pre-degree programme at the University of the South Pacific, Indian students would need a minimum pass mark of 261 in the New Zealand University Entrance Examination whereas Fijian students would need only 216 marks. The Indian community was outraged. But it was the poorer Indians who were most disadvantaged by the policy. Wealthy Indians could afford
the high fees. Of course the NFP thoroughly exploited the issue and won 26 seats. The Alliance won 22, and independents 2.

Fear and apprehension quickly engulfed the country. Would an Indian government be acceptable? How long would it last? How would Fijians react? Would the overwhelmingly Fijian military intervene? Rabuka has recently acknowledged that he did in fact contemplate staging a coup. As it happened, rivalries within the petty bourgeois leadership of the NFP meant that the party could not move quickly and decisively to form a government, thus obviating the need for a military coup.

Indeed, the NFP made overtures to the Alliance to form a coalition headed by Ratu Mara, but he would have none of it. Eventually, after four long and agonizing days during which the country held its breath, Koya was chosen to be the prime minister. But by then the governor-general, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, exercising ‘deliberate judgement’, had appointed Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to head a caretaker government until fresh elections could be held. Stunned, the NFP denounced the governor-general’s actions but there was little they could do.

The details of the crisis which followed the April elections are of lesser importance here than its general effects: denial of the democratic process and a deepening of racial fear. Many Fijians could not accept an ‘Indian’ government and many Indians feared a Fijian backlash. Political stability was under serious threat. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the subsequent elections held in September 1977 Fijians flocked back to the Alliance.

The damaging inroads made by the FNP into the Alliance’s power base forced the latter into a ‘painful and thorough self-analysis’. It ‘became obsessed with eliminating the Nationalists’. The party machine was therefore activated to counter the FNP threat. The Fijian Association, the institutional backbone of the Alliance, organized visits to Fijian villages to repair the damage caused by the FNP, especially its propaganda against the Alliance leadership. The prime objective now was to regain the lost Fijian votes: ‘for the Alliance, the [National Federation Party] was of little or secondary importance’ (ibid.). The strategy paid off. Fijian voter turnout increased by 6.4 per cent, Fijian support for the Alliance jumped by 15.8 per cent, and the FNP lost its only seat.

3 This is revealed in his interview in Islands Business, September 1987. See also Lal (1989:6).

4 For a more detailed discussion of these rivalries see Premdas (1979:195-200).
For its part, the NFP was bitterly divided. The split which emerged during the ALTA debate deepened during the constitutional crisis which followed the April elections: 'with the loss of the Prime Ministership to the NFP, each faction accused the other of sabotage thereby precipitating into the open bitter public dispute for control of the party machinery' (*ibid.*). Court proceedings were taken out to decide use of the official party symbol during the campaign for the forthcoming September elections. The Ramrakha-Narayan group won and became known as the ‘Hibiscus’ or ‘Flower’ faction; the Koya group became known as the ‘Dove’ or ‘Bird’ faction.

Of course the virulent and messy internal strife cost the NFP dearly. Its power base was divided as many Indians took sides and others decided not to vote at all. Angry that the NFP had been denied office, Indians voted in greater number for the NFP. But the factional split, coupled with the 1.9 per cent fall in the Indian voter turnout, sealed the party's defeat. The final outcome was Alliance 36 seats, NFP 15 (Flower faction 12, Dove faction 3), and independent (Ratu Osea Gavidi) 1.

As for the FNP, it lost the one seat which Butadroka had captured in April. Thereafter the FNP went into decline (Premdas 1980). But the 'low profile' it subsequently displayed is not as ‘mystifying' as has been suggested (Lal 1983:134). Without Butadroka in parliament, the party lost its primary means of maintaining a significant political presence, and without sufficient resources its already weak organizational base could not be sustained. It is not surprising therefore that the party found it difficult to continue to be the force it once was.

But the more important reason for the eclipse of the FNP was the renewed vigour and determination with which the Alliance sought to consolidate its Fijian support. Its defeat of April 1977, the party resolved, should never again be repeated. In office the party would of course pursue its class projects — supporting foreign capital, the local Indian bourgeoisie, the chiefly elite and the Fijian state bourgeoisie. But should any section of the Fijian masses again threaten withdrawal of support, the party would counter it with every available resource. And this is precisely how the Alliance responded to the only serious Fijian threat to emerge until the next general elections in 1982 — the dispute over the pine industry.

The dispute, as we saw in the previous chapter, was centred in western Viti Levu and revolved around proposals for the harvesting and further development of pine. Many western Fijians wanted a decentralized pine industry, believing that such an arrangement would be more beneficial to them. The state, however, wanted more centralized control — and got it.
Out of the controversy emerged the Western United Front,⁵ led by Ratu Osea Gavidi. It criticized the government's interventions as interference in the right of western Fijians to utilize their resources according to their wishes. Ratu Osea accused the Alliance of 'holding us back' (quoted in Martin 1981:8) and thus articulated western Fijian resentment of the 'iniquitous treatment they were receiving at the hands of the eastern chiefly establishment' (Lal 1986a:99). Not surprisingly, 'frightening' political consequences were envisaged for the Alliance (Martin 1981:8). As an independent, Ratu Osea had twice beaten Alliance candidates. Now he led a political party which threatened to undermine western Fijian support for the Alliance even more.

The emergence of the WUF was the clearest political expression up to that point of the underlying problem of uneven development. The western region contributed enormously to the national economy — sugar production, tourism, mining and the pine industry were concentrated there and the main international airport was in Nadi. Yet the benefits of development accrued mainly to the eastern region. Western Fijians resented this and the pine controversy made them more outspoken:

[The pine dispute] revived...the lingering, though rarely publicly espoused, resentments of some western Fijians against the peripheral treatment they felt they had received at the hands of the eastern (Bau-Lau) chiefly establishment. They drew attention to the paucity of western Fijians in high positions in the civil service, provincial administration, statutory bodies and the like, a disparity which seemed especially glaring in contrast to their overall contribution to the economy. These issues were brought into sharper relief when a debate in the House of Representatives to allocate $435,868 for the reconstruction and renovation of certain historic sites on Bau [in the eastern region]...led to the resignation from the Alliance of the Tui Nadi, Ratu Napolioni Dawai. He pointed to more pressing needs of western Fijians — education, water supply, roads, dormitories for school children from outer islands, which had long been neglected by the government (Lal 1986b:140-141).

With all the evidence of western Fijian discontent, the stage looked set for a possible repeat of April 1987. But it was not to be. The Alliance calculated, correctly, that Butadroka's FNP would not pose a serious challenge and turned its attention instead to the threat from the

⁵ For a detailed analysis of the dispute and the emergence of the Western United Front see Durutalo (1985).
west: ‘Gavidi's seat was the one that the Alliance made an all-out effort to win' (*ibid.*), and it did.

Apart from its vastly superior resources and much better organization, the Alliance had the additional advantage of a crucial tactical error committed by the WUF. It entered into a coalition with the NFP. The NFP wanted to expand its Fijian support, the WUF wanted to tap the resources of the NFP. But all that the coalition succeeded in doing was to alienate Fijians who might otherwise have voted for the WUF. As was to happen to the Fiji Labour Party in 1987, many potential Fijian supporters were lost because of the link with the ‘Indian’ NFP.

To make matters worse for the NFP/WUF Coalition, anti-Indian sentiment was heightened by two other developments. In its last fortnight, the election campaign took a totally unexpected turn with disclosures by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) television programme, ‘Four Corners’, of foreign (Australian) interference in the Fijian elections (see *ibid.*:147-151). The programme exposed the contents of what came to be known as the Carrol Report, ‘which was reported not only to recommend [to the Alliance] questionable tactics for winning elections but also to involve misuse of Australian aid money by the Alliance Party’ (*ibid.*:148). Enraged, the NFP/WUF coalition secured and made copies of the programme and screened it throughout the country.

But its hope that the revelations would win it more votes were dashed by the Alliance's deft reaction. Turning the charge of foreign interference back on the TV team, the Alliance described the team's visit to the country as ‘an act of sabotage against a sovereign nation’. More effectively, it seized upon and twisted the opening words of the programme that Fiji's present political leaders were descendants of chiefs who 'clubbed and ate their way to power'. This, the Alliance proclaimed, was an insult to Fijian chiefs and tradition.

The other important development was Jai Ram Reddy's 'earlier uncharacteristic and unfortunate slip-of-the-tongue statement that Mara would even open a toilet to shake a few more Indian hands to get their votes'. That too was publicized by the Alliance to portray Reddy as a racist. Needless to say, the combined effect of these developments was to harden racial voting patterns. That in turn meant that deeper contradictions were denied political expression — the regional one discussed above, and also class ones, to which we briefly turn.

Apart from temporary booms in 1979 and 1981, the country fell back into the broader trend of economic decline, and the NFP/WUF coalition, drawing on official sources, made great play of the country's economic woes: a widening trade deficit, growing indebtedness, rising unemployment (16.2 per cent in 1981), worsening inflation (11.3 per cent in 1981), mounting squatter problems, and the shortage of medical
drugs (ibid.:145, 147). The worst victims of the recession, of course, were the lower classes whose capacity to improve their lot was weakened by various forms of class containment.

The predominantly Fijian peasantry lacked organizational and other resources but were also hamstrung by tradition and the power of chiefs. Farmers and wage workers in the sugar sector were controlled by the highly restrictive provisions of the _Sugar Act_. Other workers were also constrained. Hamstrung by the repressive provisions of the 1973 _Trade Disputes Act_, and co-opted into the Tripartite Forum (which began operating in 1977), the trade unions were forced into moderation. But with pro-Alliance people like James Raman (president) and Joveci Gavoka (secretary) leading the FTUC, the 'responsible unionism' which capital and the Alliance state sought was generally forthcoming. Of course some unions, particularly the public employees unions and most especially the Fiji Public Servants Association (FPSA), were agitated by the FTUC's moderate leadership and the restraining influence of the Tripartite Forum, but for some time were unable to counteract it (see Leckie 1988:154; Howard 1985:135).

The effective containment of the working classes, then, together with the unique set of events in the latter part of the 1982 elections, meant that underlying class tensions were again submerged by the weight of racialist politics. Yet the final outcome of the elections suggests the legitimacy of the Alliance state remained problematic. The majority of 21 which the Alliance secured five years earlier was slashed to a mere 4.

In the next two years, class tensions would intensify along with the economic recession which by 1982 had already set in. Through the struggles of the labour movement and the party it spawned, the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), underlying class tensions would begin to break through the politics of race.

**Racialism breached: The Fiji Labour Party**

A dispute in early 1980 between the FPSA and the Public Service Commission (PSC), the largest union and employer respectively, led in May of that year to an agreement that there be an evaluation 'covering the classification, grading and salary structures' of all posts in the civil service. A review committee of two — Harry Nicol and Alan Hurst — was appointed and both sides agreed to abide by its recommendations from July 1981. The Nicol and Hurst Report was not submitted until July 1982, and although there were criticisms from both the FPSA and the PSC, the main point of contention was the date to implement the recommended pay increases.

Reneging on its earlier undertaking, the PSC asked the FPSA to accept an implementation date of January 1983. The latter refused;
negotiations continued until August 1983 when the matter was referred to arbitration. In the same month the government asked its employees to forgo a cost-of-living increase awarded to them by the Tripartite Forum in the previous June. Public service workers were outraged and the FTUC and other unions rallied behind the FPSA. A compromise agreement on payment of the Nicol and Hurst awards was finally reached in August 1984; arrears would be paid in installments of cash and government bonds. But many workers remained unhappy and three months later their simmering anger boiled over. In November 1984 Finance Minister Mosee Qionibaravi, in handing down the government's budget for 1985, announced retrenchments in civil service jobs and a freeze on all wages, salaries and increments. The economy was in the doldrums (GDP declined in 1982 and 1983) and as far as the Alliance was concerned workers would yet again have to bear the burden.

The reaction from organized labour was immediate and strong, and in December 1984 the executive of the FTUC unanimously decided to form the FLP. In February 1985 the two teachers unions staged a two-week strike and newly-graduated student-teachers from the University of the South Pacific went on a hunger strike to protest the government's refusal to honour its undertaking to employ them as civil servants. In the following April the Confederation of Public Sector Unions was formed to strengthen worker solidarity in the Public Service. Mahendra Chaudhry was elected secretary and Dr Timoci Bavadra (president of the FPSA since 1977) was elected president.

But by then opposition to increasing worker assertiveness was already growing. It was 'motivated primarily by the threat posed to the ruling Alliance by the proposed Labour Party' (Howard 1985:148). Suggestions were made in the Alliance-dominated Senate to tighten labour legislation, and certain trade unions were accused of having links with Cuba, the Soviet Union and Libya. Also, attempts were made to split the trade union movement. In March 1985, for example, a senior Alliance minister appealed to Fijian dockworkers on racial lines: 'Nothing can destroy Fijian solidarity' (quoted in ibid.). In the same month Joveci Gavoka, pro-Alliance leader of the blue collar Public Employees Union, announced plans to form a national organization of unions. Three months later he and other unionists, including Taniela Veitata (later to become a leading force in the Taukei Movement and currently minister for Industrial Relations), formed the Confederation of Blue Collar Unions as a counter to the Confederation of Public Sector Unions. But these and other efforts failed to break the determination of progressive forces in the union movement, and on 6 July 1985 the Fiji Labour Party was formed.

In his launching address, party president Dr Timoci Bavadra described the FLP's origins:
As the economic crisis worsened through the late 1970s and early 1980s the unions tried their best to work with the government in seeking equitable solutions. The unilateral imposition of the wage freeze last year indicated clearly that the government was no longer willing to discuss matters with the representatives of the working people of Fiji. As responsible trade unionists we felt compelled to react strongly to government policies that threaten the wellbeing of our members and, in fact, of all Fijians. We recognised that it was time for the working people of Fiji to form their own political party rather than continue to rely on the goodwill of existing political parties that increasingly had demonstrated that they represent only the narrowest of interests.

He then outlined the basic cause of increasing dissatisfaction with the Alliance:

What has become apparent to more and more people in Fiji is that a tremendous gap exists between the rhetoric by which the ruling party claims to be serving the interests of the people of Fiji and the reality. Whether one be a civil servant, cane farmer, copra cutter or urban labourer, it is obvious that the government is not doing enough and that it has become increasingly distant from the majority of people.

And as for the Labour Party:

Our aim is to provide a real alternative to this rhetoric to create a political force that truly represents and is responsive to the needs, aspirations and will of the people of Fiji. Our aim is the creation of true democracy in this country and to put an end to the many undemocratic features that dominate the political life of Fiji.

Very importantly, he explicitly stated that the FLP was ‘for all Fijians...whatever their race’. At the end of the speech, he reaffirmed the party’s commitment to the disadvantaged:

...I would like to reiterate the call of the Fiji Labour Party to do something about the disadvantaged groups within our society who have been neglected for far too long, and whose lives have become marginalised by the demolishing effects of the wage freeze, the uncontrolled price rise in essential goods and food items, and the scandalous rise in school bus fares (the full text of the speech appears in South Pacific Forum, July 1985:70-81).
These extracts capture the class foundations and orientation of the party and at the same time underline the party's denial of racial politics. Primacy is given to the underclasses — workers, overburdened rural dwellers, the urban poor, unemployed youth, the destitutes, domestic workers, the majority of Fiji women and so on. Through the FLP, welling class tensions were to be harnessed and given organized political expression.

The second half of 1985 saw growing evidence of the party's popularity. In November it scored a stunning victory in the Suva City Council elections, winning eight seats. The Alliance won seven, and independents five. It did less well in municipal elections held soon afterwards in Nadi and Labasa but its public profile was helped enormously by the publicity. Its first test as a national political force came in December when it contested the North Central Indian national in a by-election. With Mahendra Chaudhry as its candidate, the party campaigned on issues while the Alliance 'countered with standard tactics, offering patronage to voters with one hand and labelling Labour an Indian and anti-chief party with the other' (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988:36). The outcome was highly significant. The Alliance won by a mere 241 votes out of a total of 20,709. More importantly, Labour beat the NFP into second place. For a party that was just five months old, this was a stunning achievement. And for the Alliance the message was clear.

Attempts had already been made to undermine the FLP by striking at its union base. Moves in November 1985 to remove Krishna Datt as secretary of the Fiji Teachers Union were followed by threats to deregister his union and the FPSA. In 1986 the attack on the trade union movement intensified, culminating in the government's decision in June of that year to withdraw recognition of the FTUC because four of its executive members were FLP officials — James Raman, Mahendra Chaudhry, Joeli Kalou and Krishna Datt. In so doing, however, the government also brought about the collapse of the Tripartite Forum and threw the system of industrial relations into chaos.

With its union base under severe threat, the FLP leadership became increasingly worried about the future. If the FLP should fail as a political force, the future of the trade union movement would be gravely threatened. As Bavadora later recalled, 'If we were to allow the Alliance government to remain in power that would be the end of the labour movement of any sort' (quoted in ibid.:37). That feeling, together with the NFP's visible weakness, opened the way to an electoral marriage with the other opposition parties.

In early June 1986 initial talks were held between FLP and WUF leaders. It was argued that there should only be two groups fighting the forthcoming elections. At another meeting nine days later, agreement
was reached that the common objective of the two parties was to defeat the Alliance. On 26 June the move towards a coalition was taken a step further at a meeting of the FLP, WUF and NFP.

Soon, however, strong opposition to the idea of a coalition began to emerge among FLP supporters. The party, they felt, should fight the elections alone, and especially because its multiracial image was crucial, it had to avoid being tarnished by the 'Indian' image of the NFP. At the FLP's first annual convention, held in Lautoka in July 1986, opposition to a coalition was strongly expressed. However, party secretary Krishna Datt persuaded the convention to allow the party's management board a free hand to negotiate possible areas of cooperation that might serve the party's electoral strategy. In the following November the FLP/NFP Coalition was formed and the stage set for a two-way contest.

The details of the election campaign have been adequately described elsewhere and need not detain us here. What is important is the broad difference in appeal and strategy between the protagonists. The Alliance pointed to its 'record of sound leadership', claimed credit for Fiji's 'peace, progress and prosperity', relied heavily on racialist appeal (particularly to Fijians), and warned of the consequences of supporting the 'socialist' Labour Party. In contrast, the Coalition focussed on the class bias of Alliance rule and attacked the Alliance for yet again resorting to the 'politics of race and fear'. On the Alliance's class bias, a Coalition advertisement proclaimed:

Under the Alliance, the elite have feathered their own nests while conditions for the rest, particularly the poor and disadvantaged have got steadily worse. Inequalities have become part and parcel of Alliance rule. Poverty is a disease — the Alliance is the carrier (ibid.:51).

The 'party of the rich' was also confronted with a whole series of allegations of corruption and mismanagement. In addition to other claims,

Baba alleged that the [state-owned] National Bank of Fiji wrote off $4 million owed by the Stinson Pearce Group [with which Peter Stinson, Minister for Economic Planning, allegedly had an association at the time of the write-off]. Lautoka lawyer Bhupendra Patel claimed evidence in March that garment manufacturers paid $52,000 to the Alliance Party to prevent the enforcement of minimum wages. At the same time Mahendra Chaudry stated that two large businesses donated $100,000 each to the Alliance in order to protect their interests. In April Krishna Datt disclosed that sweets
manufacturers paid the Alliance $15,000 to remove the budget tax imposed on Indian sweets (ibid.).

Of course the charges were denied, but neither were they legally contested.

The Coalition's message to the electorate, especially the 'poor, weak and disadvantaged' of Fiji, was that what the country needed was 'clean, caring and open government'. It promised anti-corruption legislation, a leadership code, abolition of the Official Secrets Act and enactment of a freedom of information act. Its economic platform rested on several key planks: economic growth, better utilization of resources, more jobs, a just wage, better working conditions, fair prices and easier access to finance. In the area of social welfare it promised to work towards housing for all, better education, adequate health and nutrition at low cost, a fair deal for women and youth, greater assistance for the elderly, disabled and destitute, and a physically safer society. Its programme for 'fair and open government' rested on the promise to make government more accountable and more accessible.

It is this broad reformist thrust which lies behind the Coalition's victory. But the electoral gains achieved by the Coalition's undoubted appeal to the underclasses might have been greater were it not for the Alliance's exploitation of racialist sentiment and fear. As an Alliance pocket meeting was told, 'If the Alliance falls, the Fijians will never lead this country'. This strategy of trying to divide the Fijian masses was most effective in relation to the vital question of land.

The Coalition promised to set up a Native Lands and Resources Commission to allow greater involvement by ordinary Fijians in decision-making about the development and management of their land rather than having such key decisions made by the NLTB and other institutions. But the Coalition also stressed that the proposed Commission would work with the NLTB.

The proposal was immediately attacked by the Alliance, claiming that it would jeopardize Fijian land rights. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Coalition did not question Fijian land rights, which in any case were solidly safeguarded by the extremely tight provisions of the 1970 constitution. Amendments to constitutional provisions relating to Fijian interests required a 75 per cent vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate and also the assent of at least six of the Council of Chiefs' nominees in the Senate.

For the Coalition, what was at issue was not ownership of Fijian land but its class control, and here Bavadra pointed to the Alliance's mismanagement of Fijian commercial ventures such as the failed NLDC, the FIDC, Naviti Investments and the Lomaiviti Company. What is more, he went on to say, 'All these businesses were established by the hard earned cash of the poor villager' (quoted in...
Slamming the Alliance's lies as an example of the 'politics of fear', he addressed this statement to Fijians:

They are lies of desperate men clutching on to the last vestiges of power and privilege. Do you really believe that I, a son of the land, would ever dream of letting my Coalition threaten your land. I would never do what the Alliance government has done to the people of Nasomo over their land (ibid.).

The Coalition had earlier released a statement outlining how Nasomo land had been given to the Emperor Gold Mining Company without consideration of rentals or compensation for the Nasomo people.

The Alliance's gross misrepresentation of the Coalition's policy on Fijian land clearly showed that it was concerned about its Fijian support. But its worries stretched way back. In 1983 the Council of Chiefs proposed another reorganization of the system of native administration. It recalled that the reorganization of the mid 1960s was prompted by 'a general feeling that the Fijians needed to be emancipated from the control of the Fijian Regulations and central authority' (Great Council of Chiefs 1985:64). But now it complained that 'the abolition of the Fijian Regulations and the winding up of the Fijian judicial system, together with the non-enforcement of by-laws, meant that many of the decisions of the Provincial Councils were not pursued to their logical conclusion' (ibid.:65). The worry now was that while

[T]he line of authority from the Provincial Council to the [Fijian Affairs Board], the Great Council of Chiefs and the Minister for Fijian Affairs is clear and understood....[b]elow the Provincial Council the Fijians have tended to wander from one authority to another (ibid.:68).

The upper echelons of the Fijian community were worried that they were losing control over the Fijian masses and duly commissioned a review of the provincial administration. In 1984 the review team submitted its report. The broad thrust of the recommendations was that the provincial administration be expanded. If implemented, greater control could be exercised over the Fijian masses. In March 1987, one month before the general elections, the Alliance announced that the provincial administration would be reorganized. How much effect that had on Fijian voters is difficult to tell, but the announcement pointed very suggestively to Alliance's unease about the loyalty of its traditional power base.

As it happened, the Alliance won all the Fijian and general elector communal seats while the Coalition won all the Indian communal seats. But several features of the final outcome are highly significant. First, overall voter turnout fell to its lowest level ever — 70 per cent
compared with the alltime high of 85 per cent in 1982 and a usual turnout rate of about 80 per cent. This suggests a higher degree of voter anxiety than ever before, which is understandable given that for the first time there was now a credible but untested alternative to Alliance rule.

Secondly, the lowest turnout rates occurred in Indian communal constituencies taking in the urban, peri-urban and rural areas around the capital, Suva: Suva Rural 60.3 per cent, Suva City 61.7 per cent and Nasinu/Vunidawa 62.5 per cent. By comparison, voter turnout in the Fijian communal seats, which cover roughly the same area, was generally higher: Kadavu/Tamavua/Suva Suburban 65.6 per cent, Ra/Samabula/Suva 67.1 per cent, Lomaiviti/Muanikau 68.7 per cent and Rewa/Serua/Namosi 71.9 per cent.

On the logic of the argument about racial voting patterns, the low Indian turnout rates would have hurt the Coalition and the higher Fijian turnout rates would have helped the Alliance. More importantly, these differential effects should have been repeated in the four most crucial seats in the elections — the four national seats which cover the southeastern region around Suva — and thus increase the Alliance’s chances of victory. But they were won by the Coalition.

The seats were the Suva Fijian, Suva Indian, Southeastern Fijian and Southeastern Indian national seats, and turnout figures given above clearly suggest that they could not have been won by the Coalition without considerable Fijian support. And that there was such support is suggested most strongly by the fact that the Coalition’s winning margins were bigger in the two constituencies where there were more Fijian than Indian voters (Southeastern Fijian and Southeastern Indian) than in the two constituencies where there were more Indian than Fijian voters (Suva Fijian and Suva Indian national).

But there is another telling feature of the Coalition’s victory in these four crucial seats. The region covered by these constituencies contained the largest and most visible concentration of the industrial working class, the unemployed, urban youths and squatters. This is the region where, especially in Suva, much of the intense industrial conflict of the preceding five years was played out. It was here, therefore, that class antagonisms were likely to be at their sharpest and most visible. It was here that the Coalition’s appeal to the underclasses was most likely to find a receptive audience — including, very critically, a Fijian one. It was here that the Coalition defeated the Alliance and breached the politics of race most clearly.

But the historic victory was to prove shortlived. No sooner had the Coalition taken office than the forces of reaction set about undermining it.
Racialism reasserted: coups and the Alliance's return

As we noted earlier, the biggest losers in the elections were the eastern-dominated chiefly elite and the Fijian state bourgeoisie. Immediately their representatives began a destabilization campaign which soon came to be organized around the Taukei Movement. (*Taukei* are the indigenous Fijians and the term derives from *Taukei ni qele* which literally means owners of the soil.) Among the prominent figures were the following:

- Ratu Meli Vesikula, an eastern chief, formerly a sergeant major in the British Army and who previously served in Cyprus and Northern Ireland;
- Apisai Tora, former minister for Rural Development;
- Filipe Bole, formerly minister for Education and before that permanent secretary for Education;
- Ratu Finau Mara, an eastern chief, eldest son of Ratu Mara, and a lawyer in the Crown Law Office;
- Jone Koroitamana, chief executive of the Civil Aviation Authority;
- Dr Inoke Tabua and Jona Qio, both Alliance Senators;
- Aparosa Rakoto, formerly an Alliance Senator;
- Jone Veisamasama, secretary of the Alliance Party;
- Taniela Veitata, Alliance MP;
- Ratu Ovini Bokini, the Tui Tavua and a brother-in-law of Filipe Bole;
- Viliame Govelevu, Alliance MP and vice president elect of the Methodist Church in Fiji
- Rev Tomasi Raikivi, a Methodist minister;
- Ratu Inoke Kubaubola, an eastern chief, president of the Fiji Council of Churches, and secretary of the Fiji Bible Society;
- Ratu George Kadavulevu, a senior eastern chief; and
- Ratu Josaia Tavaiqia, a senior western chief, Alliance MP and former minister for Forestry.
Beyond the Politics of Race

The details of the Taukei Movement’s destabilization campaign and the military coup which followed it on 14 May 1987 are relatively well known and have been adequately described elsewhere (see Robertson and Tamanisau 1988; Piper 1988). What is important here is that the campaign was essentially an attempt by the Fijian elite to recapture power, and that the keys to their success were the racist ideology of ‘Fijian paramountcy’ and Fijian monopoly of the means of violence.

Riding on the back of the Fijian masses — workers, peasants and the unemployed — the disgruntled Fijian elite projected the former’s disadvantaged class condition as a racial problem, a ‘Fijian’ problem. And the cause of their predicament was, the demagogues claimed, a racial one — the Indians, who were not only ‘economically dominant’, but now ‘politically dominant’ as well. If therefore the ‘Fijian race’ was to be ‘saved’ from the ‘Indian threat’, strong action was needed. And who better to lead the Fijians than chiefs and the Alliance.

Here was Fijian elite racism at its Machiavellian worst, and that at least some sections of the Fijian masses succumbed to it is suggested by the turnout of some 5,000 Fijians at an anti-government demonstration in Suva at the height of the destabilization campaign. Two weeks later, on Thursday 14 May, the military, led by Sitiveni Rabuka, ousted the Coalition government. Again many Fijians took to the streets to show their support for the ‘revolution’ that was supposed to liberate their race from the ‘Indian threat’. The governor-general, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau (who is also Rabuka’s high chief), helped along by internal and external pressures, offered some resistance but eventually, on 15 October, ‘gave up the struggle’ and resigned. On 5 December he became president of the Republic.

The historic breach in racialist politics that had recently been achieved by the FLP was effectively reversed. But the ease with which this was achieved is not surprising in view of the country’s long history of racism. It was not difficult to get Fijian support for the extremist and racist demands put forward by the Taukei Movement and later used by the military to justify the coup. For many ordinary Fijians, then, objective class interests were overwhelmed by racist ideology.

But it was not long before the Fijian masses began to see that what had been done supposedly on their behalf — the overthrow of a government which many of them had elected, the terrorization of Indians, and the violation of basic human rights — was really intended for another purpose, a class purpose. ‘Fijian supremacy’, they soon began to discover, really meant supremacy of the Fijian elite.

In the wake of the May coup came political chaos, social tension and disastrous economic decline. Retail sales fell by 20 per cent, manufacturing output by 50 per cent and property values 50 per cent. Wages were slashed, farmers delayed the cane harvest in protest, cane
mill workers refused to work believing that they might not be paid, the number of tourists plummeted, foreign reserves shrank, the Fiji dollar was devalued by 17.75 per cent, and skilled and professional people left in their hundreds (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988:119). Before long the economy was tottering on the edge of collapse and the signs of discontent began to show.

The two English-language dailies, particularly the Fiji Sun, highlighted the injustices resulting from the coup and in Suva emerged the Back to Early May Movement. It called on the governor-general to return the troops to barracks, place security in the hands of the police and courts, resummon the dissolved parliament, form a government of national unity, and begin a proper examination of the constitution after first translating it into Fijian. Armed with a petition signed by 110,000 people, it was ‘able to claim that many people wanted a new political compromise’ (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988:129). In the west, discontent was shown most dramatically by the massive destruction of pine forests: ‘altogether 365 fires in the west damaged 6,500 hectares of pine forest by September’ (ibid.:129. I thank Robertson for pointing out that the number of fires was 365, not 651 as incorrectly stated in his book).

Faced with economic disaster and growing opposition, the regime tried to restore stability and business confidence and allowed talks between the Alliance and the Coalition with a view to achieving some political accommodation. That produced the Deuba Accord of 23 September under which ‘both parties agreed to participate equally in a Caretaker Government under [former governor-general] Ganilau’ (ibid.:138). But the Taukei Movement would have nothing of it, and spokesman Vesikula issued this warning:

The Taukei Movement would like to remind the people of Fiji about the consequences of a caretaker government in Northern Ireland in 1971 during a civil strife similar to the one here. Seventeen years later, 10,000 civilians and security forces were dead; some 50,000 were badly wounded; properties, assets, business establishments reduced to ashes or rubbles...and still no solution insight (quoted in ibid.).

On 25 September the military again took over the country, and thereafter the economy again plunged into crisis. The currency was devalued by a further 12.25 per cent, inflation worsened, wages were cut again, and even more jobs were lost. Again the worst hit were the underclasses. For the Fijian masses in particular, the pain and discomfort was now so much the worse because they now saw more

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6 For more detailed discussions see Knapman (1988); Cole and Hughes (1988); Kasper, Bennett and Blandy (1988).
clearly that the the fruits of the ‘revolution’ staged in their name going to the Fijian elite who had recaptured political power.

The regime went through four changes. The first two — the Council of Ministers of 15 May and the Council of Advisers of 23 May — were dominated by the Alliance. The third followed the Taukei Movement’s outright rejection of the Deuba Accord and the second military coup on 25 September. Following the second coup, Rabuka agreed to hold discussions with Ganilau, Bavadra and Mara on 5 October. But sensing that he had the upper hand, he changed his mind and on 1 October abrogated the 1970 constitution. The talks went ahead but Rabuka presented his ‘minimum demands’ for restoring executive authority to the governor-general — a 67-seat parliament with 36 seats for Fijians; ten-yearly reviews of the constitution; reservation of the offices of governor-general, prime minister, Home Affairs and Fijian Affairs for Fijians; and an entrenchment of the Sunday ban on sport and trading that he had already imposed. The Alliance accepted the demands. The Coalition refused. The next day, 6 October, Rabuka declared Fiji a Republic and three days later appointed the third Council of Ministers. It was dominated by Taukeists, among whom, very significantly, were Ratu Meli Vesikula and Sakeasi Butadroka. During their short tenure, however, the economy deteriorated further and social tension worsened. They were ousted by the military who on 5 December appointed yet another Council of Ministers overwhelmingly dominated by the Alliance with Ratu Mara as prime minister.

At the bureaucratic level, the return of the Alliance was accompanied by the sidelining of key officials whose loyalties to the regime were seen to be suspect. More trustworthy, invariably Fijian, ones took their place. Ultimate power still rested with the military, but without the political and administrative competence to run the country, it needed the services and support of the Alliance-dominated Fijian state bourgeoisie.

The relationship between the two has not always been smooth, but it is in the outcome of their cooperation that the seeds of their possible undoing lie. For while both have benefitted, the masses have become worse off. More importantly at this historical juncture, the Fijian masses are worse off. What is more, they have not only begun to recognize the hidden class agenda of the upheavals that were engineered supposedly for their betterment, but also have started to act on it.

Apartheid Fiji-style: racism and resistance in the Republic

The move to draw up a new constitution which would ensure Fijian political supremacy began with the formation of the Constitutional
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Review Committee in July 1987. In September 1988 the regime released a draft constitution and later set up the Constitution Inquiry and Advisory Committee (CIAC) to receive and report on submissions on the draft. International criticism of the draft constitution quickly followed its release and within Fiji the oppositional forces represented by the Coalition rejected it outright. Over the next two years the regime sought to contain the continuing opposition but without success, and by the middle of 1990 it was clear that the ruling elite had become desperate. Their main worry was the growing disaffection of the Fijian masses, and it was primarily in response to that that several crucial amendments were made to the draft before a new constitution was promulgated in July 1990. In order better to appreciate the significance of the changes (which we examine in the next chapter), it is necessary first to outline the key objections to the draft constitution and indicate the nature of the growing discontent, particularly among ordinary Fijians.

In its submission to the CIAC in January 1989 the Coalition totally rejected the draft constitution:

The anti-democratic nature of the Draft is obvious from the composition of the legislature, which would now be unicameral. Section 38 provides for 67 members, of which 28 would be Fijians, 22 Indians, 1 Rotuman, and 8 General Electors. Given that Indians are the single largest community, there is serious discrimination against them. The unrepresentativeness of this provision is aggravated by paragraph 7 of the same section which provides for 8 members (with all the rights of elected members) to be appointed on the nomination of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga [Great Council of Chiefs]. Since the Bose Levu would be a body of Fijian chiefs, it is a fair assumption that a large majority, if not all of these members would be Fijians. In addition these members would not owe their seats in the legislature to any democratic process or elections. The Draft itself prescribes no criteria or procedures for their nomination, opening the way to abuse and arbitrariness. Indeed the Draft does not even define the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, a serious omission given the important role assigned to it, and symptomatic of the disregard of the democratic principles and procedures which characterize the Draft.

The undemocratic nature of the legislature is also underlined by the provision in section 67(4) whereby the prime minister can nominate a further 4 persons who, despite not being elected, would thereby become full members of the legislature. Again, it may not be unreasonable to assume that the majority
of these members will be Fijians, given that under the proposed membership of the legislature, the person who is prime minister would be dependent on Fijian support. Thus the number of Fijian members could be as high as 40 out of a total membership of 71. This means that Indians, representing 48.65 per cent of the population [which totals 715,000] would have 31 per cent of the seats; the Fijians with 46.6 per cent would have 56 per cent of the seats; and the General Electors with 5 per cent of the population would have 11 per cent of the seats. Also, 12 out of [the] 71 members would be unelected and nothing precludes them from forming a cabinet. A House so composed can hardly claim to be fair or democratic ((National Federation Party and the Fiji Labour Party Coalition Submission on the Draft Constitution to the Fiji Constitution Inquiry and Advisory Committee, 16 January 1989, pp.9-10).

The Great Council of Chiefs (Bose Levu Vakaturaga) referred to in the submission is a new and smaller body created by a restructuring of the existing council and it is there that the regime intended to concentrate more political power. This explains the immense political influence accorded to it by the draft constitution. The Bose Levu Vakaturaga, in other words, was created to strengthen the position of the ruling Fijian elite, and in part this was achieved by excluding potential opponents of the regime from its membership.

Initially this kind of exclusion was made possible by the absence in the draft constitution of any definition of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, something which the Coalition criticized. Before the coups, membership of the Council of Chiefs included all 22 elected Fijian members of the House of Representatives. After the coups, however, they were excluded from the Council, and that they might be excluded permanently was the reason for the Coalition's concern. That concern was vindicated in June 1990 when a meeting of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga formally determined its future membership and decided that elected Fijian members of parliament would not necessarily be included.7 But such members were not the only potential opponents.

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7 Prior to the coups, the Council of Chiefs was constituted by all elected Fijian members of the lower house of the Fiji Parliament, 8 chiefs appointed by the minister for Fijian Affairs, 7 others appointed by him, and representatives of each of the provinces (2 or 3 depending upon size of the population). Membership of the newly-constituted body is as follows: 42 representatives of the provincial councils (3 for each of the 14 councils and chosen at each council's discretion); 3 nominees of the president; 3 nominees of the minister for Fijian Affairs; 1 nominee of the Rotuma Council; and 5 ex-officio members, namely the president,
The restricted membership of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga necessarily meant that not all chiefs would be included in it. Which chiefs, therefore, would be excluded? And how would they feel about their exclusion?

In the lead-up to the 1987 elections there had been a debate about relative chiefly status and the distinction between ‘high chiefs’ and ‘sub-chiefs’ offended many chiefly egos. It was always likely, therefore, that exclusion from the Bose Levu Vakaturaga would cause offence and increase inter-chiefly rivalry. And that it had precisely that effect became publicly evident in December 1991 when chiefs from the western province of Nadroga/Navosa formed a new political party. But we take up that story in the next chapter.

The draft constitution also reserved certain key positions for Fijians — prime minister, chairman of the Public Service Commission, commissioner of police, and chairman of the Police Service Commission. Effectively the same applied to the president who would also be commander-in-chief and who ‘shall be appointed by the Bose Levu Vakaturaga’. The draft constitution also stipulated that the commander of the Military Forces be an ex-officio member of the House of Representatives and the cabinet. Little wonder, therefore, that the Coalition rejected the document as ‘authoritarian, undemocratic, militaristic, racist and feudalistic’.

Neither is it surprising that the vast majority of Indians and other non-Fijians opposed the draft constitution. But much more worrying for the regime was that there was simply not the solid Fijian support for it that the regime expected, and it was that which led to threats of yet another coup. In a speech in October 1988 Ratu Mara reportedly ‘forewarned of a new military takeover unless the Draft Constitution was adopted’. A couple of weeks earlier, Rabuka reportedly told the Nabua military camp congregation that he had been given the ‘green light’ by Mara to take over again if there was not unanimous Fijian support for the Draft Constitution...[He] urged the worshippers to get the message to the Fijian people that they must support the constitutional proposals (Fiji Situation Report (FSR), 20 October 1988).

One reason for the Fijian disapproval was the proposal that Fijian electoral constituencies be the same as the existing provinces. Behind that lay a massive gerrymander designed to undercut Fijian opposition and preserve the existing leadership. First, it would seriously

the prime minister, the commander of the Armed Forces, the minister for Fijian Affairs, and the permanent secretary for Fijian Affairs. See Dunstan (1990).
undermine the political clout of urban Fijians whose votes would be split and redistributed to provinces whose boundaries cut into urban areas. The votes of urban Fijians would therefore be swamped by those of their rural, and generally more conservative, counterparts. Secondly, the proposal was biased heavily in favour of provinces where support for the existing leadership was likely to be strongest. This served to give an even sharper edge to another axis of post-coup intra-Fijian tension.

Since the May coup traditional rivalries between the three political confederacies of Tovata, Kubuna and Burebasaga resurfaced as a major factor in the intra-Fijian power struggle. Fijians belonging to the Kubuna and Burebasaga confederacies soon became increasingly agitated by what they perceived to be Tovata dominance in the regime. At the top of the power elite were Tovata people like President Ganilau, Prime Minister Mara, Rabuka, Education Minister Filipe Bole, and Public Service Commission Chairman Poseci Bune. It is true that 'relationships extend across confederacies and political lines', and that the present Fijian elite includes people from the Kubuna and Burebasaga confederacies. But it is equally true that the allegiance of the latter is 'political, not tribal; their motivation [being] the restoration of Fijian ruling class authority' (Robertson and Tamanisau: 1988:99).

For disadvantaged Fijians this is precisely the problem: that what is essentially class power appears in various forms — as military, politico-bureaucratic, chiefly or tribal power. And these forms have become the immediate foci of Fijian opposition and resistance. Antagonism towards Tovata dominance is one example of this.

Another is the formation in 1988 by western chiefs of their own fourth confederacy, the Yasayasa Vaka Ra (see map). Significantly, that development was helped by the support given to it by Ratu Sir George Cakobau, indicating a split within the eastern chiefly establishment. The Vunivalu of Bau, paramount chief of Fiji and head of the Kubuna confederacy, was previously a senior member of the Alliance and Fiji's first governor-general. Important though his blessing was, the formation of the fourth confederacy was grounded first and foremost on solid western Fijian support. And in that regard, the military’s response to a strike in Lautoka in October 1988 helped to strengthen that support. At a sawmilling complex 150 workers, mainly Fijian, struck when forty of their colleagues were made redundant. The strikers asked Rabuka to intervene on their behalf but to their disgust he sent in troops who duly broke up the strike (FSR 20 October 1988).

The new confederacy was rejected by the regime in November 1988. But the rejection simply added to the antagonism already generated by the highly repressive Internal Security Decree (ISD) of June 1988, which followed the discovery two months earlier of arms smuggling into Fiji. Worried, the military decided to flex its muscles
yet again. On 17 November while the cabinet met to consider, among other things, the fourth confederacy and possible suspension of the ISD, an estimated 300 troops were deployed onto the streets of Suva. Media establishments, public utilities and government buildings were surrounded by both plainclothes and uniformed troops. In that highly threatening atmosphere, the fourth confederacy was rejected by the regime and four days later the Council of Chiefs followed suit:

The formation of the Yayasa Vaka Ra confederacy by most of Western Viti Levu's chiefs was rejected by the Bose ni Turaga meeting at the Nabua military barracks[!] on Monday 21 November 1988. Most of the western chiefs boycotted the meeting whilst others walked out after the opening ceremonies. The meeting then went ahead and endorsed nominations for the newly restructured Great Council of Chiefs based on the existing three confederacies. The heavily populated western region is split between two...confederacies [Burebasaga and Kubuna][and] is the Fijian powerbase of Dr Bavadra's Labour Party, although both the newly elected President of the [Western] Confederacy (the Tui Vuda) and his advisor, Apisai Tora, are conservative...Ministers in [the present regime] (FSR 23 November 1988).

It is highly significant that at the November meeting the Council of Chiefs did not ratify the draft constitution. To have done so when western chiefs had so forcefully and directly demonstrated their anger would have been highly impolitik. But worse was yet to come. Six months later, in May 1989, the Twelve Member Committee of the Western Confederacy made its submissions to the CIAC in which it launched a stinging attack on the draft constitution and the regime. For what it reveals, the document is worth quoting at length:

The draft constitution was promulgated amidst promises of returning Fiji to Parliamentary democracy. It fails because it does not provide for equal participation of all the peoples of Fiji in their government....

We are constantly being told the draft constitution will improve the status of indigenous Fijians. It fails because it does not provide for their equal representation in their government.

By urging false distinctions between Fijians and all the other peoples of Fiji, the proponents of the draft constitution have endeavoured to imply a special unity among Fijians. The draft constitution destroys that unity by discriminating against and
compromising the human rights of Fijians as readily as it does all others!...

While invoking an almost sacred call to preserve Fijian tradition, the proponents of the draft constitution seek to codify for their own benefit an oppressive, authoritarian system of thought and action that will usher in a new era of exploitative insular imperialism that augurs ill for Fiji and the Fijians!

If the proponents of the draft constitution truly believe it serves the best interests of the Fijian people, why aren’t we being told the truth about it? If the nature and provisions of the draft constitution must be misrepresented to gain the support of the Fijian people, what are the real intentions of its proponents? Who are its real beneficiaries?...

[Two years after the 14th May 1987 coup d’etat], we know [that] “race” and “indigenous Fijian rights and aspirations” are not really the issue; even though the draft constitution is being “sold” in those terms. We know those are not the issues because, under the draft constitution, the rights of indigenous Fijians are as badly compromised as any....

The draft constitution does not discriminate then along purely racial lines. It discriminates against the progressively productive, better educated, forward thinking Fiji citizens of all races in favour of that minority segment of the community that represents (and seeks to reserve for itself) the aristocratic, undemocratic, privileged patterns of colonial life. Sadly, the draft constitution sanctions and implements discrimination against indigenous Fijians by other Fijians....

The government defined by the draft constitution is not a Parliamentary democracy and the resulting society will not be democratic. Adoption of the draft constitution would sanction the continuation of military and chiefly rule imposed by and embodied in the interim government. The draft constitution is not designed to return Fiji to Parliamentary democracy, as we have been promised. Rather [it] seeks to perpetuate the interim government and its ilk in permanent office....

We conclude by reiterating that the pattern of government defined by the draft constitution is totally undemocratic. In West and Central Africa, it’s called re-tribalization. In South Africa, of course, it’s called apartheid! Nowhere is it called democracy! (Twelve Member Committee of the Western
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Strong words indeed, so it is not surprising that when in June 1990 the Bose Levu Vakaturaga decided on its future membership, important chiefs from the west, particularly Nadoga/Navosa, were excluded.

But alongside the deepening regional cleavage between east and west were other intra-Fijian struggles. An important one occurred within the leadership of the Taukei Movement. By March 1988 the movement was deeply split. Veitata, who along with Tora (until he was sacked in 1991) is a minister in the present regime, formed the Domo ni Taukei (Voice of the Taukei), while Ratu Meli Vesikula claimed to represent the original movement. Disillusioned with the ‘Mara regime’, Vesikula later joined forces with the man he helped to oust, Dr Bavandra. His reason for the turnaround was described in one report: ‘He believes the Taukei were used by Mara to regain office using the cover of Fijian interests. He now says that ordinary Fijians are living in poverty whilst a corrupt government is in power’ (FSR 23 November 1988).

Vesikula’s cooperation with Bavandra was all the more significant being an eastern chief, and the new relationship was seen as an extension of Bavandra’s effort to win more Fijian support. A major part of that effort was ‘Operation Sunrise’, a project started in the second half of 1987 and which involved Bavandra visiting rural Fijian villages to explain his party’s views.

In the urban areas, too, Fijian resistance hardened. In 1988 senior Fijian civil servants sympathetic to the regime tried to divide the FPSA along racial lines by forming a separate union for Fijian civil servants, the Viti Civil Servants Association (VCSA). It declared its support both for the draft constitution and for a third coup should the draft constitution not be accepted (FSR 30 September 1988). It is highly significant therefore that the breakaway union drew few members, the majority of Fijian civil servants preferring to stay with the FPSA (FSR 8 December 1988).8

Another telling example of intra-Fijian conflict within the trade union movement was the struggle between the long-established, 250-member Seamen’s and Portworkers’ Union (SAPÜ) and the newly-formed, FTUC-backed Fiji Foreign Going Seamen’s Union (FFGSU). Previously led but still ‘under the effective control of Industrial Relations Minister Taniela Veitata, the former ‘[used] roughhouse tactics to thwart the growth of the now 600 strong FFGSU’. On 14 February 1989 two members of the FFGSU were assaulted by the

8 For a more detailed and recent discussion of the VCSA see Leckie (1991).
secretary of the SAPU when they tried to board their ship, the *MV Fijian*. In the words of one report, the growth of the FFGSU ‘appears to be a reaction amongst Fijian workers against racist unions...and although the FFGSU is officially recognized by the company involved....[Veitata] has since arbitrarily cancelled the FFGSU recognition agreement’ (FSR 16 February 1989).

Other developments have served to increase intra-Fijian tension: the suspension in 1988 of Ratu Apenisa Cakobau, son of Fiji’s paramount chief, from his civil service position for having ‘questioned/ridiculed the Minister for Fijian Affairs’ and also for having questioned the ability of the prime minister and the president to lead the country (FSR 28 April 1988); the continued harassment of other Fijian opponents of the regime; the intimidation of Fijian journalists; and the ‘public brawling’ which seriously split the religious bastion of the Fijian community, the Methodist Church.

In February 1989 Fiji’s leading Methodist dissenter, the Reverend Akuila Yabaki, described the deepening Fijian pessimism and disaffection, pointing out that the euphoria and sense of power that were apparent among some Fijians in the early days of Rabuka’s republic were disappearing:

> Life has not improved. People’s expectations were raised after the coups that things would be better. That dream is still there but they are starting to say: ‘was it worth it?’ *(Sydney Morning Herald 11 February 1989).*

With Fijian opposition growing, the regime became increasingly desperate. In a document letter-dropped to 10,000 Fijian households in Suva, Taniela Veitata issued this threatening message:

> He who is not proud of his race has no right to live and should go hurrying, with that crazy demon DEMOCRACY, to bloody hell! *(ibid.)*

But Veitata was obviously less willing than others in the regime to heed the evidence of growing opposition. Towards the end of February 1989 senior military officers met to reconsider the draft constitution. In Rabuka’s words, ‘We have been listening and gauging the pulse of the nation on the draft constitution and we have decided to have another look’. Without saying whether or not the military was happy with the draft, he reportedly gave the impression that the draft might not be accepted: ‘We are gauging the feelings of the nation on it and present indications seem to be going the other way. If it does go the other way, what then?’ *(Fiji Times 23 February 1989).* Could it be that the military was considering reverting to the 1970 constitution? The fact the officers would not discuss the Coalition’s submissions on the draft constitution seems to suggest not. In any case, the real powerholders appeared to
show some willingness to accommodate the welling resentment of the ‘authoritarian, undemocratic, militaristic, racist and feudalistic regime’ which they installed and continue to prop up.

At the economic level, also, Fijian discontent was growing. Initially there were hopeful signs that the longstanding economic disadvantage of the Fijian masses might be resolved. Section 20 of the draft constitution, for example, contained promising provisions. It obliged ‘Parliament and the Government’ to promote Fijian ‘interests and aspirations’ and in particular their ‘cultures, traditions, and social, educational and economic wellbeing’. To that end, Section 20 allowed for certain proportions of state-funded scholarships and business or trade licences to be reserved for Fijians. These provisions were soon acted on. The previous policy of reserving 50 per cent of government scholarships for Fijians was abandoned, allowing the regime to allocate a higher proportion to Fijians. To encourage more Fijians to enter into business, the regime approved a nine-point plan in November 1988, the broad thrust of which dovetailed with the objectives of the Viti Chamber of Commerce (VCC), an organization formed by Fijians in late 1987 to ‘promote and encourage meaningful participation by indigenous Fijians in business’.

The focus of the scheme was the ‘restructuring and strengthening of the executive capability of the Fijian Affairs Board to formulate and implement policies and strategies aimed at improving the lot of Fijians in all sectors’. The plan included cabinet approval of a $20 million interest-free loan to the Fijian Affairs Board to buy shares in Fijian Holdings Limited (‘the holding company for Fijians at the national level’) which, in turn, would acquire shares in ‘profitable companies in the industrial and commercial sectors’. Such investments were seen as part of a strategy to achieve 15 per cent Fijian ownership of the corporate sector by 1995 and not less than 30 per cent by the year 2000.

The plan also proposed reservation of certain lines of industrial and commercial activity for Fijians; minimum Fijian ownership in selected resource-based industries; Fijian ownership of at least one English daily newspaper; more money and concessions for FDB commercial loans to Fijians; and the introduction in 1989 of a Fijian Store Scheme to help ‘selected indigenous Fijians with the necessary talent to successfully manage retail businesses’ (*Fiji Times* 14 December 1989).

Implementation of the plan began soon afterwards. In January 1989, for example, the regime announced that restrictions on the importation of white polished rice would be eased and that, of the

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9 Section 20 also applied to Rotumans, a small group of Polynesians whose islands are part of Fiji.

17,000 tonnes to be imported in 1989, 3000 tonnes would be set aside for importation by Fijians (Fiji Times 20 January 1989). Also, in the course of that year the number of Fijian retail outlets increased and a Fijian-owned English daily newspaper was established.

These promising signs, however, were of little comfort to the vast majority of Fijians, for as we shall see shortly, they gained little from the policy of 'positive discrimination'. But that outcome is not at all surprising precisely because it exposed the class character of the policy. The policy was less an attempt to secure the economic advancement of the Fijian race than an attempt to realize the critical class project which the Alliance had pursued in the mid 1970s but had failed to achieve — the development of a Fijian business-capitalist class, a Fijian bourgeoisie. As was true of the Alliance then, the viability of the post-coup regime depended in large part on its ability to provide evidence of Fijian economic advancement. But such advancement essentially meant Fijian success in business; in other words, the development of a Fijian bourgeoisie.

Realisation of that class project, however, was always going to be difficult and contradictory. First, in its pursuit of that project the regime was constrained by the limited size of its resources and by the competing claims on those resources. Secondly, the development of a Fijian bourgeoisie would inevitably have contradictory consequences not only for workers but for other capitalist interests in Fiji as well. Thirdly, and relatedly, the problematic nature of the project was linked very closely to the regime's wider strategy of economic reconstruction.

In response to the deepening economic crisis which followed the two coups, the regime embarked on a strategy of economic restructuring based on increased export production, greater foreign investment, privatization and deregulation. The contradictory tension between the goal of economic restructuring on the one hand and the development of a Fijian bourgeoisie on the other was soon revealed by reactions from established capitalists. One victim of the plan to allocate import licences for a range of commodities to Fijians only was local Indian importer and industrialist Hari Punja whose business empire was estimated in 1989 to be worth $180 million. He reacted strongly to the plan and claimed that it would not succeed (The Australian 15 March 1989). That Punja is Indian is, of course, significant but so too is the fact that his sentiments echoed similar ones expressed two months earlier by other resident business interests, thus exposing a danger in the drive to get more Fijians into business. Getting at particular capitalists like Punja was one thing, creating unease among other capitalists was quite another. The nascent Fijian bourgeoisie had got an early taste of inter-capitalist rivalry.

The centrepiece of economic restructuring was the creation in 1988 of tax free zones/factories. The sales pitch to potential investors was
'Fiji: Your Profit Centre in the Pacific' and the attractions were tantalizing: generous tax concessions, duty free imports, ‘educated, easily trained labour’, ‘well developed’ infrastructural and communications facilities, access to preferential trade agreements and so on.11 By the third quarter of 1988 $24 million had reportedly been attracted under the scheme (Island Business November 1988:35). Two features of the tax-free factories were especially significant.

First, Fijians were investing in them, particularly in garment-making factories. This, together with the small but growing number of Fijians who were moving into other lines of business, underlined the emergence of an indigenous Fijian bourgeoisie. Secondly, Fijian women comprised a large proportion of the predominantly female labour force in the tax-free factories. Alongside their non-Fijian counterparts, these Fijian women workers have waged a continuing battle for better wages and working conditions. In the course of that struggle they have become increasingly conscious and resentful of the regime’s class biases, thus adding yet another dimension to Fijian opposition to the regime.

Despite the inherent dangers, the regime’s attempt at constituting a Fijian bourgeoisie is more likely to succeed than the Alliance’s earlier attempt in the mid 1970s. There are two reasons for this. First, the political need for such success is now much greater. Having gone to the extreme lengths of creating widespread tension and overthrowing a democratically-elected government for the expressed purpose of advancing Fijian interests, the present rulers urgently need to provide

11 These benefits were elaborated in a full-page advertisement in the December 1988 issue of the regional magazine Islands Business:

Fiji offers Tax Free Zone/Tax Free Factory status for export enterprises which includes:
- Tax holiday for 13 years
- No withholding tax on interest, dividends and royalty
- Freedom to repatriate capital and profits
- Duty free entry of capital goods, plant and equipment, raw materials, components, spares, and building materials, furniture and fixtures
- Freedom to import specialist personnel

In addition to the above:
- Get your products to US, Canada, Japan, EEC countries, Australia and New Zealand either duty free or at substantially reduced duties under preferential trade agreements Fiji has with these countries
- Have access to educated, easily trainable and cheap labour force
- Enjoy excellent sea and air freight connections
- Enjoy well developed infrastructure services, including ISD, Telex, Fax, etc.
evidence of such advancement, in particular Fijian *economic* advancement. The emergent Fijian bourgeoisie is deemed to be evidence of this.

The second reason has to do with the strengthened position of the Fijian state bourgeoisie. After the coups, Fijians came to occupy an increasing number of key civil service positions, many of which had been vacated by Indians who retired or resigned after the coups. As Table 8.5 shows, between July 1987 and June 1989, for example, 904 Indians resigned from the service and a further 310 retired. The corresponding figures for Fijians were 157 and 220 respectively. Table 8.6 shows, however, that the number of new appointments taken up by Fijians was three times that of Indians, 725 compared with 302.

**Table 8.5 Resignations and Retirements from the Fiji Civil Service by Racial Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resignations</th>
<th>Retirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-Dec 1987</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec 1988</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-June 1989</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leckie (1991:66)

**Table 8.6 New Appointments in the Fiji Civil Service by Racial Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/7/87-30/6/88</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/7/88-1/6/89</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leckie (1991:66)

The formation of the Viti Civil Servants Association in late 1987 was an important factor behind this 'Fijianization' of the bureaucracy and
how that process has altered the racial balance of the public service is indicated by the figures in Table 8.7.

### Table 8.7 Racial Composition of the Fiji Civil Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fijian</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No %</td>
<td>No %</td>
<td>No %</td>
<td>No %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/5/87</td>
<td>8067</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>8208</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>962</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17237</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/6/88</td>
<td>8413</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>7621</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>928</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16962</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31/5/89</td>
<td>8648</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>7127</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>648</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14423</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leckie (1991:67)

With the Fijian state bourgeoisie now in a stronger position than before, the chances are greater that more state resources will be put to the service of 'Fijian economic nationalism', and in particular to the development of a Fijian bourgeoisie. And that the Fijians most likely to benefit from this are well-connected ones is suggested by a 1988 report on Navi Naisoro, senior public servant and architect of the tax free factories scheme: 'Indirectly he is in business himself. His wife is a shareholder in a garment factory' (ibid.).

But what of the Fijian masses? For them the early promise of the regime's policy of 'positive discrimination' and its strategy of economic restructuring came to little. Indeed, even as the regime boasted about economic recovery in 1989 (when the Gross Domestic Product grew in real terms by 12.5 per cent\(^{12}\)), evidence was emerging that the benefits of 'positive discrimination' and economic growth were being spread very unevenly.

A study undertaken in that year pointed to the 'dramatic increase in poverty' since the coups (Barr 1990). It also provided telling accounts by ordinary people of their worsening situation, and for the regime, the deteriorating economic condition of the Fijian masses in particular was of special significance. From the accounts of Fijian factory workers, domestic workers, copra cutters, cane cutters, unemployed youths, squatters and villagers, it was clear that the Fijian masses were hurting. As one villager put it, 'life is a struggle'. Especially significant were the telling signs of antagonism towards chiefs: 'the chief is taking the best of everything'; and '[The chiefs] used to share with us but not now' (quoted in ibid.:76, 79).

\(^{12}\) For a review of the Fiji economy since the coups see Elek and Hill (1991).
By the end of 1989, then, the nature and level of Fijian discontent had become increasingly problematic for the regime. Earlier expectations (even presumptions) by the regime that Fijian support for it would be solid and lasting were never wholly tenable; now they were even less so. The major worry now was that the draft constitution which had been designed to keep the ruling Fijian elite in power could no longer be relied upon to do that. The draft constitution therefore had to be changed to counteract the threat posed by the sobering realization amongst the increasingly disaffected Fijian masses that behind the ‘revolution’ staged supposedly on their behalf lay a class agenda to which they had already become victim. As one Fijian friend put it, ‘Sa dola na mata’ — ‘the eyes have opened’.
Chapter 9

The Myth of Fijian Supremacy: Class Rule in the Republic

In July 1990 the new constitution of Fiji was promulgated. The way was now open for elections. In the preceding June, the Council of Chiefs declared its approval of the constitution and announced that a new political party would be formed. Dubbed ‘the chiefs’ party’, its name, Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT), roughly means Fijian Political Party. The timing of these developments was not fortuitous. Continuing scrutiny by the international community of the pace of Fiji’s return to ‘parliamentary democracy’ and the lingering concerns of potential foreign investors about the political situation in Fiji had put pressure on the regime to provide a clear indication of the country’s future direction. More important, however, were internal pressures and of these the most critical were the pressures of Fijian discontent.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the key political conflicts in post-coup Fiji were intra-Fijian ones, and the more that Fijians fought among themselves the clearer it became that Fijian disenchantment with the regime was on the increase. By the middle of 1990 three years had passed since the coups, and for many Fijians there was little to celebrate. Not only had their economic condition worsened but also there was now a distinctly hollow ring to the ‘political supremacy’ supposedly won for them by the coups. For them ‘Fijian political supremacy’ meant little if they could not exercise political choice. The cynicism which followed each postponement of the election is therefore not surprising.

By mid 1990, then, the regime was confronted with a dilemma. There was pressure to speed up the return to ‘parliamentary democracy’ and to hold elections. Failure to accommodate that pressure was clearly risky; but so too was the alternative of accommodating it, for in the face of mounting Fijian disaffection the regime’s electoral fortunes looked shaky. The strategy it decided upon was to amend the provisions of the draft constitution in a way that would increase its chances of electoral success and also to form a political party to spearhead its electoral effort.
The events of mid 1990 were a turning point in post-coup Fiji. By clearing the way for elections, they created the political conditions which allowed the class character of intra-Fijian tensions to emerge more clearly. By that time underlying class contradictions in Fiji were worsening and one year later they had so intensified that the regime was driven to launch a major attack against the working classes. That began in May 1991 with the announcement of proposals to introduce a value added tax and new anti-labour legislation.

An important feature of the political crisis which that produced was the way in which the racial solidarity amongst the working classes highlighted the class face of intra-Fijian tensions. A second important feature was the intensifying struggle between Mara and Rabuka. That struggle was an expression of the growing contradiction between chiefs and commoners. More importantly, it also had to do with a class agenda to re-establish links between the state and capital, particularly established Indian capital, which had been broken by the coups. We will argue that elements of the populism which Rabuka increasingly demonstrated after 1991 threatened the class interests of capital and the state and that Mara's attempts to marginalize this pretender to his throne was driven not only by personal and chief-commoner tensions but also by the need to defend the class interests of the regime and its capitalist allies.

For the masses, unfortunately, the prospects became progressively gloomier as the organized opposition became more and more divided. By the end of 1991, deep divisions threatened to split key opposition groups — the FTUC, the Coalition and the FLP. By March 1992 when elections were formally scheduled for the following May there were no fewer that fifteen political parties. At least nine could be classified as opposition parties, and of those five were Fijian parties. This proliferation of parties, particularly the emergence of the New Labour Party as a result of the split within the FLP, underscored the fragmentation of the organized opposition. This did not augur well for the future of Fiji’s underclasses. Class rule had changed in its configuration but nonetheless remained deeply entrenched. Divisions within the the leaderships of the opposition forces threatened to make class rule easier. The immediate origins of that story lay in the gerrymander orchestrated by the regime in mid 1990 to contain rising Fijian discontent.

Fijian discontent and the gerrymander

The 1990 constitution is similar in most respects to its draft version. The provisions for the reservation of key political positions for Fijians, the increased political power of the Council of Chiefs, the military’s ultimate responsibility for the welfare of the country, and other similar
provisions remained intact. Not surprisingly, the major changes related to the electoral provisions. The total number of seats in the lower house was set at 70, with 37 seats reserved for Fijians, 27 for Indians, 5 for General Electors, and 1 for Rotumans. Of the 37 Fijian seats, 32 are for the fourteen provinces and 5 for urban Fijians.

The distribution of seats provided for under the draft constitution had been severely criticized for being racially biased, and that criticism remained valid in respect of the new provisions. The underrepresentation of Indian voters and the overrepresentation of non-Indian voters are indicated in Table 9.1 below.

**Table 9.1 Distribution and Weighting of Seats in the House of Representatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Voters</th>
<th>Voters Number</th>
<th>Voters %</th>
<th>Seats Number</th>
<th>Seats %</th>
<th>Voter per Seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fijian:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>110619</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>3457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>43276</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>153895</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>4159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotuman</td>
<td>3572</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Voters</td>
<td>10607</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>148522</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>5500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Total</td>
<td>316596</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Against the overrepresentation of Fijians generally, however, lies the stark underrepresentation of urban Fijian voters and also of two key Fijian provinces, Ba and Nadroga/Navosa. Urban Fijian voters made up 13.7 per cent of the total voting population but had only 7.1 per cent of the seats. The corresponding figures for Fijian voters in Ba province were 5.3 per cent and 4.3 per cent, and for Nadroga/Navosa 3.6 per cent and 2.9 per cent respectively. But there is further evidence of bias against these provinces. For Ba the average number of voters per seat was 5,584 and for Nadroga/Navosa 5,713. As Table 9.2 below shows, these were the highest figures by far for all fourteen provinces.

The discrimination against these provinces was strengthened by improving the representation of provinces where support for the regime was rather better. Under the draft constitution, Ba, the most populous province, was given four seats. That was reduced to three. In contrast,
the number of seats for Lau (province of Prime Minister Mara), Cakaudrove (province of President Ganilau and Rabuka), and Tailevu (province of Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica) was increased from 2 to 3. The gerrymander was most blatant in the two least populated provinces, Serua and Namosi, where the number of seats was doubled from one to two. Together they accounted for a mere 1.5 per cent of voters but a massively disproportionate 5.7 per cent of the seats. And compared with Ba and Nadroga/Navosa, where the the average number of voters per seat was well over 5,000, for Serua and Namosi the figures were ridiculously low — 1,438 for Serua and a mere 955 for Namosi. It is telling that the Namosi Provincial Council had earlier opposed the creation of separate urban Fijian seats (Fiji Voice April/May 1990).

**Table 9.2 Fijian Voter and Seat Distribution By Province**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of Voters</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
<th>Percentage of Voters</th>
<th>Percentage of Seats</th>
<th>Voters Per Seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ba</td>
<td>16751</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadroga/Navosa</td>
<td>11425</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cakaudrove</td>
<td>12963</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailevu</td>
<td>12879</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lau</td>
<td>6343</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serua</td>
<td>2876</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namosi</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naitasiri</td>
<td>9892</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macuata</td>
<td>7818</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra</td>
<td>7140</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lomaiviti</td>
<td>6388</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bua</td>
<td>5198</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadavu</td>
<td>4817</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewa</td>
<td>4202</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *ibid.*

Such, then, was the gerrymander orchestrated by the regime. The new distribution of Fijian seats was especially controversial but quite unsurprising. It was intended to undermine those areas where Fijian opposition to the regime was generally acknowledged to be most
heavily concentrated. This was one of the two prongs in the regime's attempt at damage control. The other was the formation of the SVT. The regime's transparent desperation was immediately ridiculed, and the cynicism was well captured by Simione Durutalo, then still a vice-president of the Fiji Labour Party:

This is the last hurrah of the chiefs. It is an attempt to stem the tide and salvage their hold and support of the Fijian people. There has been a gradual erosion of their political influence, accelerated particularly in the urban areas and this is a last ditch attempt to contain that (ibid.).

In the months that followed, the cynicism showed few signs of abating but worse was yet to come. One week before the constitution was promulgated, the Fiji Labour Party had announced that it would boycott elections. For a while the SVT's electoral chances looked reasonable, and all the more because Butadroka's former political party, the Fijian Nationalist Party, had by then broken up. Butadroka formed the Christian Fijian Nationalist Party (CFNP), and later his former colleague, Isireli Vuibau, formed the Fijian Conservative Party (FCP). But whatever optimism this split might have produced for the regime was soon dented with the formation of the All National Congress (ANC).

A meeting convened in January 1991 in Nadi by leading General Electors from the west agreed to launch a new political party which Nadi businessman Mick Beddoes described as 'a united party without racial associations or groupings' (Islands Business February 1991:25). Present at the meeting were 'several influential Fijian politicians' prominent among whom was Apisai Tora, a commoner from the west and minister for Infrastructure and Public Utilities. His presence suggested a desire to distance himself from the SVT, but he was also concerned about eastern chiefly dominance. As one report put it: ‘Tora believes that it is time western Fijians challenged the convention that eastern Fijians are the country's naturally-born leaders' (ibid.). Tora became president of the ANC and at a meeting of the Ba Provincial Council in the following May he criticized the formation of the SVT. Soon afterwards he was sacked from the cabinet, the official reason being that cabinet ministers were not allowed to hold office in a political party and Tora had refused to resign as president of the ANC. After this he continually exploited the wider sense of disaffection amongst western Fijians.

Class conflict and the other face of Fijian discontent

The formation of the ANC heightened the regime's concern about its electoral chances but there was also the added problem that the SVT
Beyond the Politics of Race

had not yet been formally constituted. That did not happen until October 1991. It is significant therefore that in April 1991 the elections, which in the previous year appeared so imminent, were again postponed. The Electoral Commission announced that the elections would not be held until mid-1992 and a few weeks later Mara expressed his support for the postponement when he opened the National Economic Summit on May 2 (Fiji Voice May/June 1991). Administrative difficulties were given as the reason for the delay but the evidence pointed strongly to another explanation — concern about the SVT’s electoral chances in the face of growing Fijian opposition which, moreover, was becoming increasingly organized. Beneath that concern lay two other major worries. One was the continuing struggle between Mara and Rabuka. The other was the growing level of class tension.

Well before the April 1991 postponement of the elections the regime was already planning a further attack on the lower classes. Continuing economic difficulties, industrial unrest, discontent among cane farmers, and growing pressure on state revenue spurred the regime into action. At the May economic summit it launched its attack. That offensive and the Mara/Rabuka struggle compounded the regime’s problems. But they are also important for the light they shed on the class character of the intra-Fijian tensions, and the weight they lend to the general argument advanced in this book.

In the earlier chapters we argued that the strongest tendential forces shaping the broad trajectory of development in pre-coup Fiji were class ones. The argument here is that the same is true of the post-coup period, and a test of this argument is the nature of the intra-Fijian tensions. Those tensions appeared to be a peculiarly Fijian phenomenon. But that surface appearance, as we will presently show, hid the other face of the intra-Fijian tensions, their class face. By revealing the class dimension, and tracing its connections to the wider class tensions, we seek to strengthen further the general argument of this monograph.

To advance the argument about the class character of the intra-Fijian conflicts, however, is not to deny the importance, even the primacy, of non-class factors in the explanation of particular instances of intra-Fijian tension. But we are not concerned here to explain each case of intra-Fijian conflict in all its detail and complexity; rather we seek to explain the general phenomenon of intra-Fijian tensions, why they were so important, and how they shaped the broad contours of change in post-coup Fiji. The primary task of this monograph is to explain the broad trajectory of change in Fiji, and to understand the place of post-coup intra-Fijian tensions as a whole in that trajectory. To that end we now return to regime’s latest attack on the lower classes.
The regime's class attack was launched at the economic summit in May 1991 where Mara announced the introduction of new anti-labour legislation and a value added tax (VAT) which was to become effective in July 1992. What lay behind these initiatives and the timing of their announcement?

Turning first to the proposed VAT: clearly it was the result of the fiscal crisis of the state. By early 1991 the national economy was looking shaky. The annual growth in real GDP had fallen from a high of 11.7 per cent in 1989 to 5.4 per cent in 1990 and was expected to slump even further to 1.2 per cent in 1991. In 1990 the trade deficit had grown by 3 per cent, reaching an all-time high of Fiji$311 million in 1990, and the foreign debt remained high at $435 million (Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning, *Supplement to the 1992 Budget Address*, p.5; Bureau of Statistics, *Current Economic Statistics*, April 1991, October 1991).

One effect of all of this was increased pressure on the regime's finances. As Table 5.3 below shows, the budget deficit remained high from 1987 to 1989 and then fell in 1990. The decrease in 1990 was achieved by restraining public expenditure. In 1988 public expenditure rose by 11.9 per cent and in 1989 by 13.7 per cent. In 1990, however, it rose by a mere 2.4 per cent. The belt-tightening indicated by that lower growth rate was the main reason for the reduced budget deficit in that year. But the temporary improvement obscured the deeper problem which remained — the falling rate of increase in state revenue. After 1987 state revenue increased in absolute terms but the annual rate of increase fell progressively from 17.5 per cent in 1988, to 15.8 per cent in 1989 and 10.9 per cent in 1990. By the beginning of 1991, therefore, the signs of a fiscal crisis were clear.

### Table 5.3 Public Finance 1987-1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Revenue $</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
<th>Expenditure $</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
<th>Deficit $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>352.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>451.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>99.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>414.2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>505.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>480.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>574.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>94.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>532.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>588.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991(e)</td>
<td>535.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>621.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite a reduced budget deficit in that year, the underlying trend pointed to a potentially serious cash shortage. Hence the proposal to introduce the VAT.

The alternative, of course, was to further restrain public spending, but that was politically risky. Already the austerity was hurting the masses as the knife was applied to social services, and with elections scheduled for 1992 further restraint would be unwise. The regime therefore decided against that option. Indeed, as Table 5.3 shows, in 1991 public expenditure increased by 5.4 per cent. That, of course, made matters worse. The looming cash crisis which the regime feared was underlined by the very marginal increase in state revenue that was projected for 1991, an increase of a mere 0.6 per cent.

The proposal to introduce a VAT, then, was the regime’s response to its fiscal crisis and the timing of its announcement was no coincidence. The elections had just been postponed until mid 1992 so there was a full year to sell the idea. On the other hand, one year was also plenty of time for the underclasses to realize that the burden of the tax would fall most heavily on them. And this they did. Trade unions and the FLP were among the first to condemn the tax and expose its class bias. Later, however, further attacks were made by others as well, including, very significantly, Fijian political leaders and parties.

Apisai Tora promised that the ANC would scrap the tax if it became the government (Daily Post 31 December 1991). Even Rabuka expressed serious doubts, and that he was worried about the effect of the tax on ordinary Fijians is suggested by his concern that the VAT could harm the SVT’s electoral chances (Daily Post 5 November 1991). The concerns of the Fijian Conservative Party are also revealing. Describing the VAT as a ‘political hot potato’, party secretary Jolame Uludole warned of its effects on the lower ‘socio-economic classes’ and on the ‘gap between rich and poor’ (Fiji Times 25 September 1991).

These examples of Fijian resistance to an initiative of the Fijian-dominated regime exposed the class face of intra-Fijian tensions. Here was evidence of ordinary Fijians resisting their Fijian political masters not because of something that was peculiarly Fijian but because they would be hurt by tax and its class bias.

The proposal to introduce the VAT, then, was driven by the fiscal crisis of the state. That the proposal was an attack on the underclasses is shown by the way that the burden of the tax would fall most heavily on the underclasses. And when Fijians in the underclasses resisted it, the class face of intra-Fijian conflict was clearly exposed. Much the same can be said of the new anti-labour legislation that was also announced in May 1991.
The previous year had seen growing industrial unrest and the instability was most serious in three of the most important economic sectors — sugar, mining and manufacturing. By May 1990 tensions were building in the sugarcane industry. Farmers were threatening to boycott the upcoming cane harvest in protest against the new master award that had just been handed down by Justice Kermode. A major cause of the farmers’ anger was the lower percentage of the sugar proceeds they would receive under the new award, and in the struggles which ensued strong support for the boycott was shown by many Fijian cane farmers. A meeting of the Vanua Levu Fijian Canefarmers Association, for example, revealed that its 800 members supported the boycott. More Fijian support had earlier been shown at meetings called by the National Farmers Union in Tavua and Rakiraki, and this statement by Marika Salemaibau, president of the Rakiraki branch of the NFU, is revealing: ‘[farmers] will only harvest under the old Denning contract...let’s not bring race and politics into the issue as the new Master Award will affect us all, irrespective of our race or religion’ (Fiji Voice June/July 1990).

But class tensions were not confined to the sugar industry. Gold was an important source of foreign exchange, so the regime was clearly worried when mineworkers at the Vatukoula goldmine went on strike in February 1991 over pay and working conditions. The strike lasted over one year and resulted in one death. About 90 per cent of the strikers were Fijian. In one major respect, the continuing tensions in the manufacturing sector were more serious than the unrest in the goldmines.

As we noted in the previous chapter, a key part of the regime’s strategy for economic recovery was the Tax Free Factory scheme. Since its introduction in 1988, the scheme quickly came to centre around garment production. Soon, however, garment manufacturers came under increasing attack over the low wages and poor working conditions of their workers, of whom the vast majority were women and many were Fijian. And as the workers intensified their struggle the regime became increasingly worried. After all, the ‘international competitiveness’ of the industry depended critically on ensuring that costs were kept low. By 1989 garment workers were becoming better organized and the number of disputes, strikes and lockouts grew. In an attempt to limit the damage, the regime introduced new minimum wages and working conditions at the beginning of 1991. The new minimum hourly rate for learners was 65 cents and for others 85 cents. These rates were condemned by Kevin Barr, whose earlier study of poverty in post-coup Fiji suggested a minimum rate of $1.50 an hour. The new rates were seen as evidence of ‘bowing to pressure [from] business and keeping people well below the poverty line’. Worse still, according to Ema Druavesi, secretary of the Women’s Wing of the
FTUC and a key union organizer in the garment industry, some employers were flouting the new regulations and were not being prosecuted (*Fiji Voice* March 1991). It is not surprising therefore that the industry continued to be plagued by conflict. For the regime this was a major threat. The industry on which it pinned such high hopes had to be protected from the increasingly assertive workers.

It is against this background of continuing industrial unrest in key economic sectors that the introduction of the anti-labour laws in May 1991 need to be understood. Justified in terms of ‘protecting the economy’, the draconian decrees (numbers 18 and 19) were in fact a response to rising class tension. And in terms of the argument we are developing here, an important feature of the growing class conflict was its strong ‘Fijian’ character. Increasingly Fijians were confronting bosses and the state not as Fijians but as workers. Previously the outwardly ‘Fijian’ appearance of intra-Fijian conflicts was strong. Now, however, it was being stripped away and the class face of those conflicts surfaced more and more. In the months ahead, when the regime intensified its attack against the working classes, that class face became even clearer.

By May 1991 the miners’ strike in Vatukoula showed no signs of ending and in the canefields farmer patience with the regime was quickly running out. For a long time farmers had complained about the continual postponement of elections to the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC) and also about the regime's failure to pay the remaining $8.74 per tonne owing to them under the master award which had been concluded in the previous year. Their anger was vented at large meetings organized by the National Farmers Union in Nadi, Tavua, Sigatoka and Labasa. And when they decided to boycott the forthcoming cane harvest, the scheduled commencement of cane crushing in late May was threatened. The regime's response was to invoke the anti-labour legislation which it had recently announced.

The new decrees outlawed strikes in Fiji's key industries (and sugar and goldmining were two of these) and on 29 May President Ganilau invoked them and threatened to send in the troops to break the farmer boycott. Soon afterwards Rabuka defiantly stated that he would not send in the troops against the striking canefarmers, many of whom, it needs repeating, were Fijian. Earlier he had given a similar guarantee to striking miners in Vatukoula, and nearly all them were Fijian also (*Fiji Voice* August/September 1991). Indeed, he became increasingly critical of the regime's handling of industrial unrest in the country and on June 8 called on the ‘government’ to resign. This support for workers further underlined the populist streak which by now Rabuka was increasingly showing; we will take up this issue later when we discuss his struggle with Mara.
In the political crisis which followed his call for the government to resign, Rabuka called up his reserves and for a while it seemed that he might oust the very people he had put into office. He went so far as to draw up a list of ten people he wanted to appoint to a government he would lead, a list which reputedly included the names of four people from the Coalition cabinet he overthrew in May 1987. In the end, however, he decided that to act against the regime he was a part of would be too costly politically, especially as he would have to move against Ratu Penaia Ganilau who was not only president but also his paramount chief. He therefore apologized to the president and later resigned from the army and rejoined the cabinet. But it was not long before he again showed his populist colours.

Ganilau’s action on 29 May drew immediate condemnation from the FTUC, and at a special economic summit of trade unions held on 21 and 22 June a decision was taken to stage a national strike on 16 July in protest against the new anti-union laws. The decision was even supported by conservative trade unions outside of the FTUC, such as the Hotel and Catering Workers Union, Municipal Workers Union, Factory Workers’ Union, and Telecommunications Workers Union. As the day of the planned strike approached, Rabuka met with Methodist leaders and key Fijian labour leaders in an attempt to avert the strike. On 12 July Rabuka and Ganilau met FTUC leaders Mahendra Chaudry and Micky Columbus at Government House. After a half-hour meeting the president’s office issued a statement which committed the regime to revoking the anti-union decrees and to meeting farmers’ leaders to settle farmer grievances. The statement also provided some hope that a legal avenue would be found to settle the miners’ strike in Vatukoula (Fiji Voice August/September 1991). Rabuka’s key role has been described as ‘remarkable’ (ibid.:14) but seen against well-known prime ministerial ambitions, this most recent example of his ‘populist turn’ is not all that surprising (see below).

That the 12 July meeting succeeded in averting the national strike was a significant achievement but any hopes that the working classes might have entertained that the regime’s assault had ended were well and truly dashed four months later. In the following October Mahendra Chaudhry revealed to a meeting of more than 1200 farmers in Ba the contents of a confidential World Bank report on the sugar industry. The report, he said, had been submitted to the regime three months earlier but had been kept secret because of the upcoming elections in 1992 (Daily Post 21 October 1991). He also predicted that the report would be implemented in 1992. Among the recommendations contained in the report were the following:

that land rents be increased by 300%-600%;
that growers be paid according to world market price for sugar (which at that stage ranged between 4 and 9 cents US per pound, rather than US$24-27 cents per pound that Fiji was receiving under preferential arrangements with the European Community and the United States); and

that the farmers’ share of sugar proceeds be reduced from 70% to 60% and the government’s share be increased from 30% to 40%.

The report was strongly attacked by farmers, the NFP and the FLP, and NFP leader Dr Balwant Rakka asked some probing questions: ‘who authorised the [investigation] of the industry, whom did they interview, who were in the team, and when did this take place?’ (Daily Post 26 October 1991). If Chaudhry was correct that the report had been submitted back in July, then the investigation must have been well underway in the first half of the year. If that was the case, then questions can be asked about how much the regime knew about the kind of recommendations that were likely to be included in the World Bank report when it was preparing to launch its class offensive in May 1991. In any case, the intense anger generated by the revelation of the report’s recommendations in late October was followed in early November by the promulgation of new anti-labour legislation.

Attacked by the FTUC as being little different in content and intent from the two earlier decrees (numbers 18 and 19), the new ‘labour reforms’ heightened class tensions, which by then had already become serious. Industrial Relations minister, Taniela Veitata, said that the ‘reforms’ were essential to boost economic growth and were part of the the regime’s strategy of strengthening the export sector and the country’s competitiveness in the international market (Fiji Times 6 November 1991). The new legislation was of course welcomed by employers. This was made clear in a statement issued jointly by the Fiji Chamber of Commerce and the Fiji Manufacturers Association (ibid.).

For the FTUC, on the other hand, the new decrees represented a deliberate subversion of the 12 July accord which prevented the planned national strike. The union body said they were aimed at destroying the trade union movement and dispossessing workers of their basic rights and freedoms. And this after the regime had earlier given undertakings to the contrary to two missions from the International Confederation of Trade Unions (IIFCTU), one in 1988, the other in 1989 (ibid.). The ‘reforms’ included the following:

expansion of the meaning of ‘strike’ to include
withdrawal of labour either wholly or partially or reducing its normal performance;

breach of contract of service;

refusing or failing to accept engagement for any work in which the person is normally employed;

reducing the normal output or normal rate of work;

a six-week limit on the validity of a strike ballot;

supervision of secret ballots on selected issues by the Registrar of Trade Unions or an officer of the Ministry of Employment;

postal balloting in the election of union officials;

penalties for breach of legislation;

employer deduction of trade union dues from wages no longer to be mandatory;

prosecution of unions for damages caused by strikes resulting from improperly conducted ballots;

prohibition on industrial associations from engaging in industrial disputes;

prohibition on any person to hold the position of secretary or treasurer in an industrial association if he or she is already an official of another trade union or industrial association (Fiji Times 6, 11 November, 10 December 1991).

The last of these is significant because it affected the regime's most powerful opponent in the trade union movement, Mahendra Chaudhry. That the regime had been planning to weaken his influence is suggested by a letter sent by the administrator-general, Aminiasi Katonivualiku, to the permanent secretary for Employment and Industrial Relations. Dated 7 February 1991, it said:

A member of a trade union should be able to hold office in his union. If he is also a member of an industrial association [which is what the National Farmers Union is], he should also be able to hold office in his association. The restriction being advanced here if effected, could be taken by many as directed personally at M P Chaudhry, he being an officer of three organisations — general secretary of FPSA, FTUC and the National Farmers Union (quoted in Daily Post 11 November 1991).
That industrial associations were prohibited from engaging in industrial disputes is highly significant. The two most militant industrial associations in the country were in two of the most important industries, the National Farmers Union (NFU) in the sugar industry and the Fiji Association of Garment Workers in the garment industry.

Resistance to the new legislation was immediate. The NFU vowed to defy the new decrees, the FTUC called for their revocation, and Apisai Tora promised that if elected the ANC would immediately scrap the new decrees. In his words, ‘Those labour laws will be the first to go’ (31 December 1991). Considerable external support for the fight against the legislation was secured, largely through Chaudhry’s efforts, from trade unions in New Zealand and Australia and also from international trade union organizations.

For its part, the regime showed little sign of relenting. Indeed it continued to hound Chaudhry, finally charging him in February 1992 with illegally holding office in more than one worker organization. By then, however, divisions had opened up within the FTUC as a result of disagreements over the FLP’s decision to boycott the upcoming elections. One victim of that was the national strike which had been planned for late February to protest against the anti-labour legislation. At the workplace, however, defiance of the laws continued. In February 1992, nearly 300 garment workers at a factory in Nausori continued their strike over a pay dispute despite warnings from the Chief Labour Officer that they were in breach of the new laws (Fiji Times 12 February 1991). Here were women at the forefront of the struggle against the state’s attack on working people. Many of them were Fijian, including their leader Siteri Tuilovoni. The class face of intra-Fijian tensions was again revealed.

In March 1992 the dates for the first post-coup elections were announced, 16-23 May. Campaigning was already well underway and soon gathered pace. But underlying class tensions remained unresolved and continued to threaten the interests of the regime and its allies. They were to significantly influence the unfolding electoral struggle. But here we come across an interesting twist.

In 1991 the regime had already launched a frontal attack on the working classes but its impact was blunted somewhat by contradictions within the ruling elite, in particular by the rivalry between Mara and Rabuka. That rivalry was worsened by Rabuka’s populism. In an attempt to broaden his appeal, he criticized the regime’s assault on the working classes. In so doing, he too represented a threat to the fundamental class interests of both the regime and its allies. By February 1992 his populism had become a serious class threat. The need to marginalize him had become more urgent and in January 1992 Mara acted on that need. The class dimension in the struggle between chief and commoner would soon become clear. To better understand
that class dimension and its connections with the deeper class tensions we need to go back a few years.

**Chief vs commoner: class agenda in the Mara/Rabuka struggle**

Rabuka returned Mara to office at the end of 1988. He joined the cabinet but also kept his position as head of the military. Soon, however, the latent rivalry between the two men began to surface. As early as January 1989 the commoner soldier began directly challenging the high chief from Lau, something which up until then few, if any, had dared to do. At a cabinet meeting the two reportedly ‘traded insults about the other’s use of government allowances, perks, etc. with Mara finally offering to make substantial refunds if Rabuka did the same’ (*Fiji Voice* February 1989). In the following February Rabuka was reportedly incensed at ‘being left out of important [cabinet] decisions and policies’. In particular, he was angry that ‘Mara was considering a cabinet reshuffle and that most other ministers were aware of it but he was kept in the dark’ (*ibid.*).

Over the course of 1989 the tension between the two men grew, and in September was heightened by the revelation of a military document submitted by Rabuka and Colonel George Konrote to Mara and President Ganilau in the previous May. The document was never meant to be made public. Among other things, it suggested that constitutional government be delayed for fifteen years and that more executive authority be given to the army commander (*Fiji Voice* December 1989). The heat generated by the public exposure of the document worsened when Mara later put pressure on Rabuka to choose between politics and the military. On 3 October Rabuka announced that he would return to barracks and in the following January he was dropped from the cabinet.

As we have already seen, by early 1990 the regime was under increasing pressure. Fijian discontent was growing; Apisai Tora, then still a cabinet minister, had joined the ANC; trouble was brewing in the sugar sector over the master award; under Chaudhry’s leadership public servants were pressing for a wage increase; and there was continuing industrial unrest in the garment industry. The growing unease served temporarily to contain the rift between Rabuka and Mara. Believing that it threatened the regime he had installed, Rabuka told a military parade in Suva on 22 January that the military would not tolerate any attempt to hinder progress and growth or to destabilize the country. Significantly, he specifically referred to the threat of a national strike in the sugar industry (*Fiji Voice* February/March 1990).

In the following February the military staged a major military exercise in Suva, the purpose of which, in the words of the army, was
to ‘upgrade...preparedness to handle emergencies’ (quoted in ibid.:5). In May Rabuka repeated an earlier threat of military intervention if the farmers’ planned strike against the new award went ahead. In June he told soldiers that the military was the ‘final guarantor of peace and stability for the nation’ and that trade unions and political parties should be controlled (Fiji Voice June/July 1990). In the same month Mahendra Chaudhry’s home and car were attacked by five masked men. Along with other clues, the clinical precision of the attack led to suspicions that the military was responsible.

Rabuka’s attacks against the forces of opposition in Fiji served to prevent the rift between himself and Mara widening. After earlier being at loggerheads with the prime minister, he went to the defence of the regime. But that is not surprising. He was, after all, a part of it. From about the middle of 1990, however, he began exhibiting signs of change. The hardliner was becoming increasingly populist, a shift which, interestingly, started soon after the constitution was promulgated and the proposal to form the SVT was announced. That was in June 1990.

At the end of that month nurses went on strike. Rabuka visited the striking nurses and gave them his support. In the following February he condemned the removal of thirty squatter families in Kalabu, a suburb just outside Suva, to make way for a tax free industrial complex. In the same month he even stunned diners at a Fiji Press Club luncheon when he told them he believed that the army had too much power under the new constitution and expressed his hope that the constitution might later be amended so that ‘the military be subjugated and subordinated’ (Fiji Voice March 1991).

Rabuka’s populist turn hinted at a personal political agenda which later in 1991 became clear when he publicly declared his prime ministerial ambitions. For Mara and his government, Rabuka was a threat. Not only was he making a bid for the leadership, but by showing sympathy for the plight of workers and other underprivileged groups, he was siding with the enemy. It is significant, therefore, that in April 1991 Mara offered to have Rabuka and his friend, Methodist minister Manasa Lasaro, in the cabinet. Rabuka was offered the positions of deputy prime minister as well as minister for Home Affairs. Better, after all, to draw him into the cabinet and hopefully lock him into cabinet decisions than to leave him to threaten the positions of people in government and also to drift further towards the lower classes. As one report put it, the offer was seen by some observers as a buy-off (Fiji Voice May/June 1991).

For several months Rabuka stalled on the offer. He wanted to take up the posts but he also wanted to remain as army commander. Significantly, in 1990 the president’s son, Epeli Ganilau, was promoted to brigadier-general and the speculation was that with Rabuka
in the cabinet and out of the military, the way would be clear for Epeli Ganilau to become head of the military, which is precisely what happened several months later. By the time that happened, the class threat which Rabuka’s populism posed had again become evident but this time much more menacingly than before.

The occasion was his defiance of President Ganilau over the latter’s threat on 29 May 1991 to send in troops against the canefarmers. Rabuka had earlier promised the striking miners at VatuKoula that the military would not move against them. His refusal to move against the canefarmers was especially serious because it threatened to deprive the regime of a lot of money. When, therefore, he called on the ‘government’ to resign he sparked off a major political crisis but that, as we noted earlier, ended with Rabuka apologising to the president, his paramount chief, resigning from the army and rejoining the cabinet. The president’s son became military commander.

Rabuka’s refusal to intervene militarily in the farmers’ dispute with the regime underlined his populist turn. Several weeks later it was again demonstrated by his important role in averting the national strike which had been planned for 16 July. Rabuka’s popularity was on the increase and three months later it served to reopen his rivalry with Mara.

The inaugural convention of the SVT was held in October 1991 and in the election for the presidency Rabuka defeated his two rivals, both chiefs — Ratu William Toganivalu and Mara’s wife, Adi Lady Lala Mara. Soon afterwards Mara demanded his resignation from the cabinet, invoking the policy he had introduced earlier in the year to get rid of Apisai Tora, that cabinet ministers were barred from holding office in a political party. Rabuka subsequently resigned and devoted his energies to the SVT. His rivalry with Mara was deepening.

Mara denied any hand in his wife’s candidacy for party president but he soon found himself locked in battle with Rabuka yet again. The SVT constitution provided that in a parliament led by the SVT, the party leader would be prime minister. By this time Rabuka’s prime ministerial ambition was well known. The question was whether the party president would also be party leader. Some, including Mara, argued that the two positions were quite separate; others, including Rabuka, argued that the SVT constitution tied the presidency to the position of party leader. The issue was not resolved but Rabuka clearly saw himself taking the party into the forthcoming elections as party leader (Fiji Voice November/December 1991).

Soon after assuming the party presidency, Rabuka deepened his rivalry with Mara by distancing himself and the SVT from two key initiatives which were very unpopular. One was the creation of the Fiji National Petroleum Company (Finapeco) to purchase petroleum under a monopoly supply arrangement with Malaysia; the other was the
proposed introduction of a VAT in July 1992. Among the recommendations of the World Bank report discussed earlier was a recommendation to abandon the scheme. In November Rabuka distanced himself from the scheme by saying he was not present when cabinet accepted the scheme and that he always had reservations about it. He also cast doubt over its future by saying that it could be discontinued. Mara, as the *Daily Post* put it, was 'one of the strongest backers of the oil deal' (5 November 1991). Rabuka also criticized the proposed VAT and hinted that it too might be scrapped: 'There will be a need to look at VAT, its effect, whether there are alternatives' (*ibid.*). About a month later he seemed to soften his position somewhat but he still left open the possibility of removing it (20 December 1991).

The proposed VAT, as we argued earlier, was necessitated by the regime's fiscal crisis but was an attack on the lower classes. Little wonder, therefore, that it was unpopular. By distancing himself from it, Rabuka's populist instincts again shone through; but the real worry for the regime was the possibility that Rabuka might later scrap the tax. Here was another example of Rabuka's populism compromising the class interests of the regime and its allies. That Rabuka wanted to leave no doubt about where he and his party stood in relation to Mara and his government is clearly indicated by his response when asked if the proposed VAT and the Finapeco affair could cost the SVT the upcoming election: 'The interim government is not the [SVT] and the policies of the interim government do not necessarily reflect the policies of the [SVT]' (*Daily Post* 5 November 1991).

In the face of this kind of attack, it was likely that the growing tension between Mara and Rabuka would explode in public. In early December 1991 it did. Mara announced that he would quit politics because he could not work under the new constitution. Elaborating, he said he could not 'after banging on the table of multiracialism [for 20 years] then come to be head of a non- multiracial government' (*Daily Post* 9 December 1991). Later we will take up the broader significance of this statement.

Rabuka's reaction to Mara's statement was swift and strong. He asked how genuine Mara's doubts about the constitution were, especially as he had remained silent throughout the entire process leading to its promulgation. To this and other matters including family matters that Rabuka had raised earlier, Mara wrote an extended reply that was published in the local dailies. For his part, the president refused to be drawn into the public war of words, saying 'It's between the PM and Rabuka'. But by then Rabuka had said that Mara should not aspire to becoming president of Fiji. He also revealed that he asked Ganilau to 'hang in there in the interests of the nation' (*Daily Post* 12 December 1991). Approaches had been made to certain western chiefs
to ask the president to step down. That would have cleared the way for Mara to assume the presidency.

It was inevitable that the very public dispute would cost Rabuka some support, including within the SVT, and soon rumours began to circulate that some people within the party wanted him removed as leader. When asked about this, he said that he was aware of the rumours but that he would not step down unless he was voted out by a special general meeting of the party. In the early months of 1992 the manoeuvrings against him took a revealing turn when Mara convened what came to be known as the ‘Dining Club’. This was the result of concern about growing disarray within the SVT as splits emerged in the wake of disagreements over candidate selection for the upcoming elections. But it was also an attempt to undermine Rabuka. In part that had to do with personal rivalries but it had also to do with protecting the class interests of the regime and its allies against the threat represented by Rabuka’s opposition to several key initiatives of the ‘interim government’. Before developing this argument, however, it is necessary first to consider the growing internal strife within the SVT.

With elections promised for mid 1992, the SVT began selecting its candidates in November 1991 and in the ensuing scramble for party nomination cracks began to appear. When the provincial councils met to select their candidates under the SVT ticket, disagreements about selection procedure surfaced but it soon became clear that in at least some cases the reasons for the divisions ran much deeper. So bitter were the disagreements in two provinces that they led to the formation of rival political parties in December 1991: the Soqosoqo ni Vanua ko Macuata (SVM), roughly the Macuata Fijian Party, in Macuata province; and the Soqosoqo ni Taukei ni Vanua (STV), roughly the Fijian Landowners Party, in Nadroga. The latter is particularly revealing because it not only underlined the regional cleavage between east and west but also exposed a secondary but inherent contradiction within the chiefly class.

Formed by Bulou Eta Vosailagi, the paramount chief of Nadroga/Navosa and whose traditional title is Na Marama na Ka Levu (literally, the lady who is the ‘big one’), the STV explained that its creation was the result of dissatisfaction over selection procedures adopted by the SVT in selecting its candidates for Nadroga/Navosa. But beneath this public account lay another, more telling reason. The dissension, explained Ratu Ifireimi Buaseru, Chairman of the Namosi Provincial Council, was caused not by the selection procedures but by the fact that the chiefs of the area had largely been left out of the Council of Chiefs.

The chiefs of Nadroga/Navosa, including the Ka Levu, he said, were merely ‘invited’ members of the Council of Chiefs. They were not nominees of the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, nor were they included
among the 32 chiefs nominated by the provinces. This was a put-down, a rebuff that bordered on disdain. Little wonder therefore that the STV was formed. As Ratu Ifireimi succinctly put it, it was their status as mere invitees 'which made these chiefs from the powerful province of Nadroga and Navosa feel left out [and which] was the cause of the disension and the cause of the formation of the new party' (Daily Post 9 December 1991).

This kind of intra-chiefly rivalry did little to advance the SVT's electoral chances but there were other tensions as well. As dissent surfaced in other provinces the party became increasingly divided. Personal ambition, factionalism, and even genealogy caused much stress. Indeed, genealogy emerged as a major source of division not only within the SVT but in the country at large. The key issue was the criteria for determining who was a Fijian. The issue was brought to a head by the case of Jim Ah Koy, nominated as a SVT candidate by the Kadavu Provincial Council. His mother was Fijian but his father Chinese and it was on the ground that his father was not Fijian that his nomination became controversial. The case provoked an intense and emotionally-charged public debate about who was a 'Fijian', and for the chiefly class in particular the affair had potentially serious consequences. This was indicated by Ah Koy's own objection to the nomination of Ratu Viliame Dreunamisimisi as a SVT candidate on the ground that his father was not a full Fijian. Ratu Dreunamisi's father, the late Ratu Edward Tui Cakobau, was a high chief from Bau and a cousin of the late Vunivalu of Bau (the paramount chief of Fiji). But he also had Tongan blood and it was on this that Ah Koy's objection rested.

By raising this matter, Ah Koy's objection demonstrated audacity. For others, however, it bordered on insolence and, worse still, it represented a potentially serious threat because it went to the very heart of the chiefly system. Not surprisingly, Ah Koy's action was strongly criticized. Jo Raikadroka, a member of the Vunivalu of Bau's warrior clan, criticised Ah Koy for mixing 'tradition and politics'. As he put it:

We have our traditional links and these must be respected...Ratu Edward Tui Cakobau's status is being questioned and the political virus may spread to provoke other traditional households. This is tantamount to calling for a split in the system...we are concerned that [Ah Koy] is dragging our traditional system into disrepute....Politics is politics...but to question tradition for the sake of politics may cause irreparable damage (Daily Post 26 February 1992).

Ah Koy had opened a can of worms and caused further strife within the SVT. Indeed, in March 1992 his backers within the Kadavu Provincial Council hinted at a possible boycott of the elections. But
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well before then much damage had already been done. What is more, the party's internal problems did little to stem the rising tide of opposition to it, especially Fijian opposition. By February 1992 there were no less that 15 political parties of which at least 9 were opposed to the SVT, and of those five were Fijian parties — the STV, SVM, CFNP, FCP and the Vanua Party. In addition there was the National Democratic Party (NDP). Formed in late 1991, the NDP grew out of the strike by miners in Vatukoula, most of whom were Fijian. Among its objectives, according to party secretary Atunaisa Lacabuka, was a change in the constitution because the democratic rights of union workers were under threat (Daily Post 2 January 1992). With the SVT now opposed by more political parties and plagued with internal divisions, the time was opportune for another Mara attempt at undermining Rabuka.

On 15 January 1992 Mara chaired a meeting at the home of former Alliance supporter Kuar Battan Singh (later we will consider the significance of the venue). In attendance were Mara's son, Ratu Finau Mara; the permanent secretary for Employment and Industrial Relations, Taufa Vakatale; and six cabinet ministers, Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, Berenado Vunibobo, Tomasi Vakatora, Viliame Gonelevu, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola and David Pickering. Apologies were sent by three other cabinet ministers, Jo Kamikamica, Ratu Ivini Bokini and Filipe Bole, and former Alliance minister (and Ah Koy's rival for SVT nomination in Kadavu) Akariva Nabati. They were present, however, at a second meeting held on 28 January. A third meeting followed on 11 February.

According to the notes of the first meeting, this 'select committee', which came be to known as the Dining Club, was formed to provide a forum for 'people of like minds' (Mara's words) 'under informal conditions and surroundings outside the inhibiting environment of a formal cabinet meeting' (Daily Post 15 February 1992). Mara wanted to 'to leave with people of like minds some of his experiences over the past 40 years' but also share his thoughts on other matters as well. The notes of the meeting stated: 'In his opinion the SVT is a debacle and the organisation is in disarray' (ibid.). Mara was not present at the second meeting which, as the Daily Post reported, 'went further to say no candidates in the coming elections should be on the [SVT's] management board. This was to ensure the board's neutrality in its dealings with candidates'. But the hidden agenda was not lost to the Daily Post: 'Major-General Rabuka is [a] party candidate and is on the management board as party president'. It also observed, correctly, that the formation of the 'club' came 'in the wake of attacks against the interim government and its ministers by Rabuka' (ibid.).

Cabinet minister Gonelevu had earlier stated that he no longer supported Rabuka's prime ministerial ambitions. Rabuka then revealed
that along with the late Jone Veisamsama, Gonelevu and Inoke Kubuabola had asked him to stage the coup. Another person would be named in March 1992, but more on that later. Rabuka also acknowledged that 'certain elements' in Kadavu were unhappy with him because of his support for Jim Ah Koy. But at a broader level, the Daily Post correctly noted, 'there was also the matter of his [public criticism] of a number of projects and policies — such as FINAPECO, VAT and the government's handling of unions' (15 February 1992). Indeed just a few days before the Dining Club's third meeting Rabuka declared that should it win the elections the SVT would dismantle FINAPECO: 'I've always opposed the concept of a national oil company from the beginning. And I still oppose it' (Fiji Times 6 February 1992).

Much speculation followed the formation of the Dining Club and when questioned Adi Finau Tabakau Coro denied that it was aimed at forming a rival party to the SVT, insisting instead that it was concerned to strengthen the SVT. But the signs were there that the initiative was linked very closely to Mara's rivalry with Rabuka. Mara supported Kamikamica as the next prime minister and the evidence pointed to the 'club' as a further attempt to undermine Rabuka. But another aspect of the new development raises much broader issues beyond those of the personal rivalry. Of the many questions that were asked about the 'club', one that was never adequately answered was one posed by Rabuka himself: ‘why was one of the meetings held at Kuar Battan Singh's home?’ (Daily Post 18 February 1992). For a club that had no Indian members, why did it meet in an Indian's home? The argument here is that the use of Singh's home as a venue points to an attempt at creating multiracial links of the kind that previously underpinned the former Alliance regime and at the same time served the class interests of that regime and its allies. And that even Rabuka was thinking along these lines is suggested by the second question that he posed: ‘is it the old Alliance link?’ (ibid.).

Two earlier developments provide further evidence for the argument being advanced here. The first was the original communiqué which announced the proposal to form the SVT. In it the chiefs said that the new party would 'guarantee, promote and strengthen the indigenous rights, political aspirations and political future of the Fijian people' and 'strengthen and promote the unity of the Fijian people and the consolidation of their culture and tradition' (quoted in Pacific Islands Monthly July 1990:14). There was nothing surprising about this but, as political commentator Iva Tora said, 'what did raise a few suspecting eyebrows were the provisions that the party would "accommodate association with other political/ethnic groups/parties". It was that 'mention of multi-racialism' which 'sent sirens ringing' (ibid.).
For a body which had so strongly argued the case for ‘Fijian’ supremacy, why did it now want to re-open the door to multiracialism? Who in the august body was concerned to leave open the possibility for the new Fijian party to ‘accommodate association with other ethnic groups’, particularly Indian groups? After all, the coup had supposedly been staged to neutralize the ‘Indian threat’. Furthermore, if links with other ethnic groups were to be forged sometime in the future, what form might they take? The two former leaders of the FNP were in no doubt. Butadroka saw the hand of Mara at work: ‘If this proposal [to form the SVT] did not have Mara’s blessing, it would never have been initiated’ (ibid.). For his erstwhile partner, Isireli Vuibau, the new party would be ‘a resurrection of the Fijian Association under a new guise’ (ibid.). The second telling development had to do with the formation of yet more political parties by, yet more, former members of the Alliance. In January 1991 former members of the GEA formed the General Voters Party and although its leaders insisted that the party would be ‘fully autonomous’, there was skepticism. As one report in October 1991 put it, ‘It is clear that the [GVT] will quickly align itself with the [SVT] (if it wins seats)’ (Islands Business October 1991:37). Also in early 1991 ‘Indian supporters of the discredited and defunct Alliance Party’ had formed the Fiji Indian Liberal Party (FILP). Later in the year the Cakaudrove Bharatiya Party (CBP), about which little is known, and the Fiji Indian Congress Party (FICP) were formed. Prominent in the latter were businessmen and former Alliance supporters Ishwari Bajpai and Vijay Raghwan (who became president of the Suva branch) and the sole Indian in the cabinet Irene Narayan. In November the FILP and the FICP announced their acceptance of the constitution despite some reservations (Daily Post 5 and 9 November 1991).

What do these developments suggest? As we have seen in this and the previous chapter, well before the possibility of the SVT forming links with other ethnic groups was revealed in the chiefs’ communique of June 1990, warnings had continually been sounded by a variety of interests that Fiji’s long-term future depended on a more democratic and multiracial arrangement than the constitution (in both its draft and final versions) allowed. Importantly, such concerns were also expressed by people in the business community. In the light of this, the revelation in the chiefs’ communique is not at all surprising. The door to multiracial alliances would have to be left open, and over the next year emerged precisely the kinds of non-Fijian political parties with which the SVT could easily forge links. By December 1991 those parties were in place and the evidence suggested that such links were being contemplated.

This, we argue, provides an important clue to why the ‘Dining Club’ held its first meeting at the home of Kuar Battan Singh. It also
helps to explain the timing of Mara's announcement that he could not
work under the constitution and that he could not lead a non-multiracial
government 'after banging on the table of multiracialism for twenty
years'. Having first declared his 'multiracial colours' he then acted in a
multiracial way. It is of course possible that this was driven by a
perceived need to give the SVT a multiracial appeal but the argument
here is that there was also an important class agenda.

Rabuka, of course, saw the Dining Club as an attempt to
marginalize him. As he put it: "There is still some dissatisfaction among
the group with me personally" (Daily Post 18 February 1992). The
Daily Post put the case more strongly:

Some members of the interim government have found Major-
General Rabuka a threat to their careers....They regard his
public utterance an embarrassment to the government....They
felt that Adi Lady Lala, the paramount chief of Burebasaga
confederacy and wife of Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese
Mara...should have been the SVT president. The disputes at
provincial level over the selection of SVT candidates have
reaffirmed their doubts over Major-General Rabuka's
leadership. The final straw...came when Rabuka launched a
scathing attack on Ratu Mara [in December 1991]. The attack
was probably the harshest dished out during [Mara's] long
political career....For Rabuka the writing was on the wall
when he changed his mind and decided to enter politics instead
of remaining in the army. From the outset he was the odd man
out in the cabinet. His age, unpredictability and his open style
were incompatible with old cabinet traditions. He obviously
did not belong to the fold. But to drive him out of the SVT and
politics altogether would not be an easy task because Major-
General has his own supporters and sympathisers. The stage
is now set for a showdown between his camp and Ratu Sir
Kamisese's camp (ibid.).

All of the factors identified here are important for explaining the
attempt at marginalizing Rabuka. In terms, however, of the class
agenda that also ran through the Dining Club affair, the key factor was
the threat which Rabuka's populism posed to the class interests of the
regime and its allies. He had shown sympathy for striking nurses,
miners and canefarmers; helped to avert a national strike; condemned
the eviction of squatters to make way for tax free factories; opposed the
centrepiece of the regime's attempt to cope with its fiscal crisis, the
VAT; and promised to dismantle FINAPECO. These positions posed a
threat not only to the regime but also to capital, and left to his own
devices he just might continue do even more damage.
Amongst other things, the Dining Club affair was an attempt to prevent such damage. But that did not mean simply undermining Rabuka's position as leader of the SVT, it also meant strengthening the party. That latter task would be enhanced if it could become more multiracial. More importantly, multiracial links would better serve the class interests of the regime and its capitalist allies if those links involved people who were likely to be sympathetic to those interests. Kuar Battan Singh was a former Alliance supporter and a businessman. So too were leading figures in the Fiji Indian Congress Party and the General Voters Party. The former Alliance party was known as the party of the chiefly elite and of business. By February 1992 signs were appearing that Mara and his followers were moving to forge links to ensure that any future government would be similarly biased. When Rabuka asked of the Dining Club 'Is this the old Alliance link?', the commoner may well have sensed the class agenda that ran through this latest initiative by his chiefly rival.

Clearly, then, Rabuka's rivalry with Mara further exposed the deeper tensions in Fiji — regional, chief/commoner, tribal and class tensions — and in so doing worsened the strife that internally divided the SVT. Nor indeed was Rabuka's populism necessarily cause for hope. To be sure the sympathetic positions towards the disadvantaged that he had adopted increasingly from 1991 onwards were encouraging, and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity. But three points are worth remembering.

First, his populism followed a much longer history of antagonism towards the key sections of the opposition in Fiji, particularly organizations like the FTUC, NFU and FLP and individuals like Mahendra Chaudhry. Secondly, his sympathy for the underclasses was never fully tested. To criticize policies and initiatives which advance the interests of the ruling elite and their class allies and which undermine the interests of the underclasses is one thing, to actually undo them and set in place radically different ones is quite another. Thirdly, it was not altogether clear how Rabuka might react if he failed to achieve his leadership ambitions. What might he do if the SVT did not win the elections? How would he react if he did not become prime minister? After all, he faced stiff opposition from the other likely contenders — Kamikamica, Filipe Bole, Berenado Vunibobo, and Ratu William Toganivalu. And there was also the matter of his possible links with the military. Did he still have any? If so, how strong were they? Would he activate them if he suffered electoral defeat? Significantly, in March 1992 he warned that should the SVT lose the upcoming elections in May, Fijians might rise up and fight for their interests. To many people, including Simione Durutalo, FTUC president Micky Columbus, and ANC leader Apisai Tora that sounded like a veiled threat.
In the end, Rabuka could criticize the regime's policies because he disclaimed any responsibility for them. Someone else had to carry the can. But how, for example, would he react if, as prime minister, he was faced with mounting pressure from the business sector to keep wages down? What would he do if women workers in the garment industry intensified their struggle for better wages and conditions? How would he react if a government which he led was running short of cash? Would he reintroduce the VAT or might he impose higher company taxes?

The point of questions such as these is to indicate that Rabuka was never subjected to the kind of test which would more fully reveal his real class biases. His opposition to certain policies and initiatives posed a threat to the regime and its allies, and Mara and his supporters sought to contain that threat. Rabuka could be a critic and a populist because he was an outsider. He did not have to make the tough decisions that are necessary to deal with underlying class tensions in Fiji. Only when he is forced to do so will the underclasses have a chance to judge just how deeply his apparent sympathy for them runs. Certainly he had given encouraging signs, but the signs were not necessarily cause for real hope. The real test would come if he became the country's leader.

In the meantime, the underclasses were faced with another problem. What chance there might have been of a strong and united opposition defending their interests no longer existed. Already the forces of opposition had splintered and as the elections drew closer they became even more divided. Later we will argue by way of conclusion that by 1992 the myth of 'Fijian' supremacy in post-coup Fiji was well and truly exposed and that the underlying reality of class rule which the myth sought to hide was as firmly entrenched as ever. We will also argue that for the labouring masses, the poor and the weak, the signs strongly suggested that beyond the May election lay yet more painful struggles, a future predicament that was all the more likely because the leadership of the forces of opposition had become deeply divided. To those divisions we now briefly turn.

Masses in jeopardy: the divided opposition

The NFP/FLP Coalition was always a fragile partnership. The opposition within the FLP towards the merger rested fundamentally on the argument that not only was the NFP widely perceived to be a 'racial party' but also, more importantly, its leadership was much less committed to the FLP's explicit class agenda of alleviating the plight of the underclasses whatever their racial background. Put differently, the FLP was a reformist party but it had much stronger leanings than its partner towards the working classes. That is why the key difference between the two parties has been portrayed as an 'ideological one'. As
Jai Ram Reddy, former leader of the NFP, put it in 1991: ‘[The NFP] tends to be a little conservative...The Labour Party is more ideologically-based, it had a more multiracial beginning and that helped attract a level of Fijian support which [the] NFP couldn’t’ *(Islands Business* January 1991:26)*

With its class appeal and its strong roots in the trade union movement, the FLP was the leading advocate of the underclasses in Fiji. The electoral arrangement it concluded with the NFP was therefore seen by many of its supporters, actual and potential, as a partial betrayal of its class agenda. To recapture the lost confidence would require an enormous amount of effort, maybe even breaking the link with the NFP. But that was not to happen, at least for some time yet. Only with the NFP's decision in 1991 to participate in elections did it begin to appear likely that the Coalition might come unstuck. In the meantime the uneasy tensions between the two parties constantly simmered and periodically surfaced. Thanks largely to the efforts and charisma of Dr Bavadra, they were mostly contained. With his death in November 1989 the potential for a split increased but was again contained, albeit temporarily, when his wife, Adi Kuini Bavadra, assumed the leadership soon afterwards.

One week before the constitution was promulgated in June 1990 the FLP announced that it would boycott any future election held under its provisions. That position was reaffirmed by the Coalition executive in January 1991 but by then some within the Coalition were already having doubts. On the principle that participation in elections would be tantamount to legitimizing the 'racist, undemocratic and feudalistic' constitution it had so strongly fought against, the FLP stood by the decision to boycott. From the NFP, however, a different view began to emerge. Harish Sharma, formerly deputy to Prime Minister Bavadra, hinted at the possibility of NFP participation. In his words, the party would contest ‘if it is the wish of our people’ *(Islands Business* January 1991:25). Jai Ram Reddy, a major influence on the NFP, put his case more strongly:

...while the constitution is abhorrent and something no political party with a sense of propriety can accept, I feel as a matter of practical politics, the chances of getting it improved are better by participating rather than by staying out, and perhaps creating room for mischief makers who don’t really represent the people *(ibid.)*.

It was this case for pragmatism which finally won the day within the NFP.

In April 1991 Adi Kuini Bavadra resigned from the leadership of both the Coalition and the FLP and was succeeded by Jokapeci Koroi, a vice-president of the party and a former leader of the Fiji Nurses
Association. In the following September the FLP formalized its decision to boycott and the NFP announced it would participate. But it was not long before serious doubts about the decision surfaced within the party and by early 1992 the growing schism became so wide that it forced the split which led to the formation of the New Labour Party. By then, of course, the wider political landscape had changed significantly.

By the end of 1991, earlier expectations that the NFP would sweep all 27 Indian seats in an election were tempered by the emergence of three new Indian political parties — the Fiji Indian Liberal Party, Fiji Indian Congress Party and the Cakaudrove Bharatiya Party. Also, the SVT now had to contend with not only Apisai Tora's All National Congress and but also six new Fijian parties. In the face of all this opposition and its own internal problems, the SVT's electoral chances looked shaky. There was even the prospect of the SVT being hard put to win a majority of Fijian seats. Whether or not this was a factor in the push within the FLP to review the party's decision to boycott is difficult to say. But it was certainly the case that those who urged a review were influenced by the level of Fijian opposition to the regime and the SVT.

In 1991 Jone Dakuvula returned from New Zealand to take up a one year position as organising secretary of the FLP. In part his task was to build grassroots support for the party and in that capacity he undertook visits to several parts of the country. But his quick rise to prominence was due also to his highly effective role as a party intellectual. Together with other leading party figures, he publicly engaged the regime on a whole host of issues and so helped to recapture some of the shine which for many the Party had lost since Bavadra's death.

Along with other leading Fijians within the party, including Amelia Rokotuivuna and Simione Durutalo, Dakuvula articulated the view that a review of the Party's decision to boycott was necessitated, in part at least, by the need to accommodate discontented Fijians who did not want the SVT to go unchallenged in an election and who also preferred the FLP over the other opposition parties. For such Fijians, this group argued, the forthcoming election was an opportunity to express through the ballot box the discontent and hostility they privately felt towards the regime. Amongst other factors, fear of job loss and the constraints of 'Fijian culture and tradition' had prevented them from publicly opposing the regime. And Fijians wanted the chance to show their opposition to the regime. The constitution was fundamentally faulty and they wanted to have a say, to 'seize the time' so to speak. Against this argument, others in the party stood firmly by the boycott decision. For them the decision was based on principles that simply could not be compromised. Furthermore, they argued, there was widespread support
for the boycott. The disagreement eventually led to a split and the formation of the New Labour Party in January 1992.

A major problem in trying to assess the increasingly heated debate has to do with the conflicting claims about support for the respective positions. Meetings of party leaders and delegates had reaffirmed the boycott decision several times but the evidence for widespread grassroot support was not obvious. Plans were made to hold meetings throughout the country to put the case for a boycott but that process did not really get underway until well into the latter half of 1991. By February 1992 about twenty meetings, reasonably attended (mainly by Indian supporters), meetings had been held. But by then the rift within the party executive had widened considerably, arguably even irreparably. On the other hand, the evidence to support those who opposed the boycott was not obvious either. There is little reason to dispute the view that there was Fijian support for participation and for the FLP. But whether or not the such support was widespread is not clear.

In the absence of persuasive evidence one way or another the task of winning over the other side was all the more difficult. But even if persuasive evidence had been available, there was no guarantee that either side would have been won over. As the debate unfolded it became clear that each side held passionately to its respective position, and in the pages of the local dailies, sadly, a torrent of invective was unleashed as the two leading protagonists, Chaudhry and Durutalo, levelled charges and countercharges against each other.

Tensions within the party were aggravated when the executive refused approval for Fijians within the party to contest the upcoming elections as independents. Dakuvula and others had argued that this would not compromise the party's official position. They had also considered a loose 'alliance of progressive Fijians' as a means of maximizing the chances of defeating the SVT. That too did not find favour with the Party executive. Frustrated, Dakuvula resigned from the party in February 1992.

Later that month, the dispute in the party spilled over into the FTUC. At a meeting on 20 February FTUC president Micky Columbus led an attack against the Party's decision to boycott and 48 to 12 voted to urge the FLP to contest the elections. Chaudhry's reported response was that the party was autonomous and would not be dictated to by the FTUC (Fiji Times 21 February 1991). Soon afterwards it was revealed that he would be challenged for the position of FTUC secretary at the organization's biannual conference in the following May. Less than a week after the FTUC meeting, the New Labour Party (NLP) was formed with Columbus as interim president and Dakuvula as interim secretary.
The FLP had been formed to advance the interests of the working classes. Now that it had split into two, its capacity to continue that fight was dented. The philosophy and policies of the NLP are similar to those of the FLP (see Daily Post 26 February 1992) but the rifts within the leadership of the key worker organizations would have done little for the confidence of the underclasses. With elections in May 1992 fast approaching, they were now faced with the urgings of the FLP to boycott and the equally strong urgings of the other opposition parties to vote.

For the underclasses, then, both options were problematic. To boycott would be to take a principled stand and thus capture the moral high ground, but it would also mean bypassing an opportunity to at least signal discontent with the regime. With the vote option, on the other hand, there was no guarantee of returning a government that would necessarily advance their interests. Indeed, there were grounds for doubting even the NFP. Already it was showing signs of a return to the old days when the party was dominated by men from the business and professional classes. As a former party supporter put it, ‘[The NFP] stands condemned in history as a party of the rich, the cliques, and the wheeler-dealers’, and he bemoaned the return of ‘its old and decrepit horses’ (Fiji Times 20 November 1991). His worries may not have been without foundation altogether. Businessmen and professionals figured very prominently in the party leadership as well as in the committee that was set up to select candidates for the elections. That, together with the lessons of the party’s history, would not have inspired much confidence in the NFP leadership as champions of the underclasses.

On 21 April 1992 two significant announcements were made. The first was of an electoral merger between the New Labour Party and the Vanua Party was announced. The two parties agreed to jointly contest the elections as the New Vanua Labour Movement (NVLM), with Jone Dakuvula as interim secretary. The second was that the FLP was likely to reverse its decision to boycott the elections. Explaining the imminent reversal, party secretary Navin Maharaj said ‘there was strong pressure upon the party to reconsider its boycott stand in [the] wake of ... concerns about [the] NFP’s tacit support for the new Constitution should they enter into parliament’ (Fiji Times 21 April 1992). Several days later the party decided to contest the elections, but its disagreements with the NFP, and with other parties as well, pointed to continuing divisions within the opposition.

Class rule in the republic

With the leaderships of the forces of opposition divided, the working classes, the poor and the underprivileged in Fiji could hardly entertain
prospects of fundamental improvements in their condition. The outcome of the upcoming elections might produce some unexpected results, maybe even encouraging ones, but that was unlikely to alter the key parameters of post-coup Fiji in a way that would guarantee their long-term interests. The political ascendancy of the Fijian chiefly and bureaucratic elite, the heightened political salience of the Fijian-dominated military, and the emergence of the nascent Fijian business class had altered the configuration of power relations in Fiji but the underlying reality of class rule remained.

For disadvantaged Fijians, the sharpening of traditional, regional and chief-commoner tensions served to expand the space for political expression, and that had been useful as they sought to defend their interests as members of the underclasses. Equally, however, they had also been constantly reminded that there was only so much that the state would tolerate. For the Indian underclasses this was also true, but their predicament was even worse. While they could take some heart in the NFP leadership’s opposition to racial discrimination and also in the FLP’s decision to contest, there was not the same confidence that the outcome of the elections would serve to lift them out of their abysmal class condition. As for the disadvantaged ‘general voters’, there was reason to view with skepticism the fine sounding promises of the GVT. It was, after all, suspiciously similar to the former General Electors Association, the third leg of the former Alliance Party. And in the past, especially in the lead-up to the 1987 elections, they had complained a great deal about the GEA.

Clearly, then, for those in the underclasses, irrespective of their race, the future did not look too promising. The opposition parties in the upcoming elections had said much about improving the condition of the disadvantaged groups. But the class biases and personal ambitions that characterized some of the leaderships were sufficient cause for doubt about their capacity and commitment to bring about fundamental improvement for the underclasses.

For the vast majority of people in Fiji it was unrealistic to expect much from the outcome of the May 1992 election. In the five years since the coup of May 1987 they had endured much hardship, and as events subsequently unfolded the veil of ideological obfuscation was lifted to expose the myth of ‘Fijian’ supremacy and the reality it was intended to obscure — the reality of class rule. It is even likely that multiracialist ideology and practice will return and again be used in an attempt to mask class rule. Signs of this are already there.

For Fiji’s underclasses — the vast majority of women and low income earners, the poor, the elderly, and the unpaid — the ‘brighter and better Fiji’ which five years earlier Dr Bavadra had committed himself and his party to achieving now appeared much less likely. This is not to say that the goal is beyond reach. But one thing is certain, for
the underclasses it would never come easily. They would have to fight for it, and fight hard. More than ever before, it was now clear that in Fiji there was, and is, another reality beyond the politics of race.
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Five years after the crisis of 1987, Fiji continues to be plagued by conflict. Not only have racial tensions persisted but there has also been a deepening of intra-Fijian conflict. Regional cleavages have widened, chief-commoner relations are under stress, and traditional political rivalries have resurfaced. The military coups that were supposed to rescue the Fijian race from the ‘threat of Indian domination’ have instead served primarily to entrench class rule. The crisis of 1987, in other words, had less to do with racial tension than with class power.

In advancing this argument, this book breaks with the orthodoxy which sees Fiji politics primarily in racial terms. It does not deny the importance of race, nor of other axes of conflict. It argues, however, that beneath these forms of conflict lie underlying class causes whose origins lie deep in Fiji’s history. By presenting that hidden history of class exploitation, the book seeks to contribute to a fuller understanding of the tensions in contemporary Fiji and also of what might lie ahead.

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