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‘Not with a bang but a whimper’: SODELPA and the 2014 elections

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Introduction

At the 2014 elections, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), the party representing Fiji’s chiefly aristocracy and indigenous commercial buccaneers (see below), gained more than one quarter of the popular vote and seats. Under a constitution designed by the military regime headed by Prime Minister Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, SODELPA was forced to compete in conditions that favoured the regime’s own newly founded party, FijiFirst. In such circumstances, the outcome might seem as if SODELPA’s achievement was both against the odds and substantial. A closer examination, however, suggests otherwise and raises the question: Has the political and commercial alliance clustered under the party’s banner reached a terminal condition in Fiji’s political economy? To reframe a line from TS Eliot’s poem *The Hollow Men*, is this ‘the way the world ends’ for the aristocracy and the buccaneers? Is a further extra-parliamentary attempt to capture state power, along the lines of the 1987 coup and the 2000 revolt in the name of indigenous rights, the only means by which they can regain office?

This chapter commences with a consideration of the wider constitutional and electoral terms under which SODELPA fought to secure votes. It then examines the strategy employed by the party, emphasising how playing to the strengths of the party's appeal and candidates was the best alternative possible but also highlighted its weaknesses. The final section develops the conclusion that the party's achievement was probably as successful as could be expected in electoral and parliamentary terms, but that its prospects for improving on this in the future are doubtful.

The electoral arena

In order to consider the 'best case' scenario for SODELPA's future, it is necessary to examine how the 2013 Constitution and changes to Fiji's political economy operated to affect the party's strategy and electoral chances. Some fairly obvious changes had occurred since the May 2006 elections, which was won by SODELPA's precursor, the Laisenia Qarase-led Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL), which had subsequently absorbed an even more nationalistic Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (CAMV). Not only did SDL figures lose their hold on state power in the coup of December 2006, they were also marginalised by the military regime's deliberate strategy of inserting senior officers and reliable allies into the most important administrative departments in the government bureaucracy. The media had been muzzled, with the ownership of one leading paper localised and the other becoming little more than a government mouthpiece. Under Rupert Murdoch's ownership, *The Fiji Times* had been a staunch SDL supporter and military regime critic, but with the change of ownership to a local businessman in 2010, the paper meticulously avoided controversy and punitive regime action. By comparison, the other national English-language newspaper, *Fiji Sun*, became an uncritical supporter of the military regime and consistently backed FijiFirst's election campaign. Although there had been some relaxing of repression prior to the elections, campaigning nonetheless occurred in a highly constrained atmosphere.

Under the 1997 Constitution, the 1999, 2001 and 2006 elections had been conducted on the basis of a single member electorate arrangement under the alternative voting system, with constituencies

grossly malapportioned in favour of rural areas (see Ratuva, this volume). In addition, seats were divided between 'open' or non-race based electorates and the more numerous race-based or 'communal' electorates, and were weighted in favour of rural voters. These arrangements therefore favoured parties which had strong rural support, the Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT), precursor to the SDL-CAMV alliance in 2001, and the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), with its strong support among Indo-Fijian cane farmers, rural workers and newly urbanised former farmers. The communal electoral system also underpinned the continuing parliamentary dominance of the chiefly aristocracy and further advances by the Taukei bourgeoisie (MacWilliam 2001; MacWilliam with Daveta 2003; MacWilliam 2014). The 2013 Constitution and associated decrees removed single-member electorates, instituted 'one person, one vote, one value', set a minimum figure for obtaining a seat on a proportional basis, abolished compulsory voting, and lowered the voting age to 18.¹ In short, the changes in constitutional and associated electoral rules negated the main advantages that SODELPA's predecessors had enjoyed under the previous arrangements.

There remained other important barriers to electoral success for SODELPA in 2014 in addition to those embodied in the new Constitution and associated decrees. Despite continuing disputes among candidates for high chiefly office, the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) had become a political and ideological organising centre for opposition to the military regime. The abolition of the GCC, and therefore its removal from any constitutional role, placed SODELPA, the party home of some of the more important and ultra-nationalist chiefs, at a further disadvantage. So too did the attacks against commercial supporters who had previously backed the SDL party. The most prominent of these, Laisenia Qarase, who had been prevented from running as a candidate due to conviction for corruption, spent a considerable amount of time overseas during the final stages of the campaign. The rules that formally limited candidate expenditure on campaigning

1 It has been asserted that by establishing a formula for calculating the minimum number of votes that a party needed to obtain to gain a seat, the 'one vote, one value' principle was not followed, since it acted against minor parties. None of these obtained a seat at the September 2014 elections, although the National Federation Party, which won three seats, could be regarded as a minor party, having won no seats in the previous three elections. In any case, the expression 'one vote, one value' is not usually used to refer to the allocation of seats after the votes are cast but to the relative weight of votes in the voting system.

and fundraising overseas were more honoured in the breach than in the observance, but posed a potential threat to opposition parties and other organisations. FijiFirst raised more money than all the other parties, and this was converted into a clear dominance of advertising in the press, TV and other media.

The regime had also put a targeted effort into bringing some chiefs onside, providing infrastructure and natural disaster relief efforts in their areas. With what seemed to be equivalent to a marginal seats strategy, Prime Minister Bainimarama, Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and other ministers travelled constantly around the country touting government activities. They were backed by the military, which was especially prominent in relief efforts whenever a major natural disaster struck rural areas in particular. Even if there were no longer individual electorates to be wooed, because of the change to one national constituency, these activities, together with continuous attention to roads, bridges, schools and health centres, were part of a lengthy campaign to bolster the government's and then FijiFirst's position. Once party propaganda was removed during the two-day embargo on campaigning immediately prior to the elections, the posters featuring the Prime Minister and government efforts in various areas remained on display. SODELPA faced the typical dilemma of an opposition that could only attack government efforts without any achievements of its own to publicise.

In addition to the constitutional and other political barriers faced by SODELPA, most of the major demographic and related changes in the country favoured FijiFirst. While SODELPA made much of its rural and Taukei support, this base was being undermined. The year after the military regime took power in 2006, a national census indicated that the population was roughly split between urban and rural areas. Even if these figures are accurate—and there are substantial grounds for doubting them, including questions about what constitutes rural residence when this is located very close to major urban centres and places of work including large tourist resorts—the trend was moving against rural-based parties. By 2014, unofficial estimates suggest that between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of the country's population lived in the Nausori–Suva–Lami conurbation, with a further 20 per cent in the west of Viti Levu from Nadi through Lautoka to Ba. Some support for these estimates is given by the proportion of votes coming from the Central and Western districts: 43 per cent and 38 per cent respectively.

So, however places of residence are officially identified as being urban or rural, over 80 per cent of the total voting population lives on Viti Levu, the most commercialised island in terms of production and consumption. The voting population in the other two districts, Northern and Eastern, amounts to less than 20 per cent of the total, with the Eastern district having fewer than 5 per cent of the voting population.

The voting age was lowered to 18 by the 2013 Constitution, and probably 25 to 30 per cent of voters at the 2014 elections were less than 30 years old and had not had a ballot previously. FijiFirst, as the effective incumbent government, was well placed to capture the bulk of the urban and some of the rural youth vote. This was also probably the segment of the voting population least likely to enthuse over SODELPA's association with chiefly rule, Taukei land rights and demands for a Christian state. Government pre-election moves to reduce the costs of schooling, to strengthen tertiary education and to 'create' jobs appealed not only to parents of school-age children and young people, but to young voters as well. Changing the distribution of lease monies in 2012 away from chiefs to provide equal distribution to all *mataqali* members not only assisted in providing more money for households which could be spent on purchased goods, church levies and the like, but were also designed to undercut SODELPA's popular base, as well as to bolster the government's, and consequently FijiFirst's, support among Taukei. Once again, being in opposition put SODELPA at a decided disadvantage by comparison to FijiFirst because the government could respond directly to these demographic and other changes with policies and expenditure.

SODELPA's strategic definition

As already noted, in previous elections Fiji voters were largely forced into identity politics that emphasised race/ethnicity.² The act of voting was constructed on these lines, with voters required to line up as Taukei, Indo-Fijians or 'general' electors (i.e. other races) and to cast votes for seats, the majority of which were defined as communal. Even as population movement occurred out of rural and into urban areas, with production and consumption for the entire voting population increasingly commercialised, voters remained trapped in these identities in part due to the gross malapportionment favouring rural seats.

The broad features of the various communal electoral arrangements sketched above are well known, but less often noted is the fact that these electoral features were installed by, and secured the political power of, the chiefly aristocracy and indigenous commercial buccaneers. The basis of this aristocracy remained heredity, including attachments to particular areas of land and forms of labour, particularly smallholders of landowning units. That many of the aristocrats are becoming increasingly impoverished serves to emphasise the universality of their existence as rentiers. The process of aristocratic impoverishment in Fiji is similar to that which has occurred in other parts of the world, including in Europe. On that continent there is popular comedy about poor nobles, full of pretensions and clinging on to the last vestiges of their castles and manors, the grand estates of the past, of which the British TV sitcom *To the Manor Born* is a good example. There is no less disdain for the aristocracy in Fiji, epitomised with the popular appellation for the now abolished chiefly institution, namely, the Great Council of Thieves.

2 The confusion between identities is not only found in public discussion of Fiji's political economy but is also common in academic accounts. For one instance among many, see Lal 2006, pp. 1–2, where race, ethnicity and communities are all employed to distinguish between populations. Lal invokes the predominant Weberian liberal form of describing and analysing Fiji's political sociology, which nominates races, ethnicities and communities as forms of identity, even occasionally referring to class on a similar basis. This is distinct from and opposed to a Marxist understanding, in which race etc. are forms taken by class, that is class *as if* race, *as if* ethnicity, instead of the liberal pluralist rendering of class *and* race, class *and* ethnicity, class *and* community, class *and* gender, and so on. In this essay, it is not necessary to show the relative salience of class over race and ethnicity for Fiji, which would require shifting epistemological ground to that liberal Weberian position which is being criticised.

If the most important and wealthy chiefs were critical for the first phase of indigenous accumulation, in concert with European and Indo-Fijian businesses, from the 1980s the second phase aggressively broke with this past (Ratuva 2013). While holding political power remained important, plundering state assets and using state power as the basis of accumulation characterised a particular form of accumulation. The Fiji Development Bank and the National Bank of Fiji were utilised by politicians and businessmen and women to fund enterprises that largely took over existing commercial operations, including through the use of state power to force out earlier owners or secure joint ventures. Unlike the coup of 1987, which facilitated the commercial advancement of those whose form of accumulation is here characterised as buccaneering, the 2006 coup was important for the political and commercial marginalisation of many of these earlier indigenous accumulators.

In the case of wealthy Taukei and their Indo-Fijian equivalent, the politics of identity could also be used to disguise the causes and effects of commercialisation on the mass of the voting population. Where households have faced stagnant or declining living standards over recent decades, racial and or ethnic identities have been consistently used for electoral and other political purposes by the holders of state power. Electoral laws that forced voters into Taukei, Indo-Fijian and other blocs were only the most obvious expression of the connection between identity, state and political power. Even when the screen of identity weakened, as in the 1999 elections when voters expressed welfare and other grievances against the two main parties, the SVT and the Indo-Fijian-dominated National Federation Party (NFP), they were forced to vote for other parties that were formed largely around racial or ethnic identity. The People's Coalition, which won the 1999 elections, was primarily an amalgam of voters signalling reaction against the SVT government and a rejection of its coalition partner, the NFP. Most electors could express their opposition only by voting for the FLP and a number of Taukei parties where chiefly figures and their associates held power.

Although the 2014 elections were held under rules that aimed to undermine many of the previous advantages held by parties based on understandings of identity, the main opposition party, SODELPA, nevertheless remained as a reminder of that past. That past included the SDL, 'a party defined by the objective of placating indigenous

discontent' (Fraenkel & Firth 2007, p. 75). SODELPA's main leadership comprised two high chiefly figures—Ro Teimumu Kepa, the Roko Tui Dreketi of Rewa in south-eastern Viti Levu, and Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, the Tui Cakau from Cakaudrove in Vanua Levu—and also the banned but still active figure of deposed prime minister Laisenia Qarase from Lau, who worked his commercial contacts to help finance the party's campaign. Through these figures, SODELPA kept the mantle of its Taukei predecessors—the SVT, SDL and CAMV. Although both Kepa and Lalabalavu are Roman Catholics in a country where Methodists comprise the predominant Christian denomination, a spirit of ecumenism among the party's leadership made it possible for this difference to be glossed over. Instead, their hereditary status and 'Christian-ness' were emphasised in the party's campaign.

Once the 2013 Constitution was promulgated, and the terms of the elections that reshaped the electoral arena for the 2014 contest were set out, SODELPA retained its roots in the SDL–CAMV heritage but worked to rebrand the past. The most obvious way in which this was done involved incorporating the 'old' parties SDL–CAMV in the new party's name, regardless of the confusing and rather antagonistic political ideologies represented in it. The SDL, the party that saw itself as the bastion of indigeneity, was required to anglicise its name under new regulations and chose 'Social Democratic Liberal Party' in an attempt to retain the close association with the SDL acronym, and to continue its 'mighty mission and a sacred cause' for 'the people of Fiji' (SODELPA 2014a). While there is not space here to document completely how the rebranding occurred, two central concerns of the transformation can be noted: religion and land.

Prior to the launch of the SODELPA manifesto, the party struggled to come to terms with a key feature of the 2013 Constitution. Section 4 effectively defined Fiji as a secular state, understood in terms of complete religious freedom with no one religion being privileged. Sub-section 4(1) reads: 'Religious liberty, as recognised in the Bill of Rights, is a founding principle of the State' (Fiji Government 2013). Opposition to this kind of liberal secularism ran deep within the SODELPA leadership and among Taukei supporters, so that for much of the pre-election period SODELPA's leaders insisted that it would change the Constitution to define Fiji as a Christian state. Acknowledging the difficulty of amending the 2013 Constitution to attain this objective, and recognising that the party could not

win the elections while retaining the ethnic and religious identity of its predecessors, SODELPA's platform became a mishmash of compromising statements. 'The Guiding Principles and Values' listed in the manifesto included 'The freedom, equality and dignity of all religious denominations'. However, the manifesto, which sought to 'Reclaim Fiji', also declared in its 'Aims and Objectives' a promise 'To uphold Christian values and principles and to respect the beliefs and values of other religious faiths'. Describing the 2013 Constitution as 'Godless', the manifesto spoke of how the Constitution 'ignored the role of Christianity in the development of Fiji'. Secularism became cast as an attempt 'to encourage worship of an unknown deity'. SODELPA insisted that when it formed government, a new constitution would 'Ensure God's rightful place in our supreme law' and 'uphold Christian values and principles'. While ecumenism made it possible to ignore possible clashes between different Christian denominations' values, there was no doubt that religions other than Christianity would have a subordinate place in the proposed new document. Instead, with Christianity dominant, the Constitution would simply 'Ensure respect for all religious faiths and religious freedom of all citizens' (SODELPA 2014a).

While commercialisation and urbanisation have provided increasingly significant forces to counter earlier regional and rural loyalties, the indigenous vote had previously shown great fragmentation in specific circumstances, as in 1999. Industrialisation and its effects should not be confused with one form of industry—manufacturing. In Fiji, the stagnation and even decline of the garment industry has been conflated with the ongoing process of industrialisation, which reigns in construction, tourism, fishing, some areas of agriculture and financial services. To illustrate, the construction of very tall buildings for offices and residential accommodation in city and town centres occurs through industrial labour processes with complex divisions of labour and equipment applied on site in Fiji and in other countries, wherever the cement, steel, glass and machinery is manufactured. The existence of large tourist resorts, one major component of the tourist industry, represents industrialisation in their construction as well as in their daily operations: food is prepared on an industrial scale in large kitchens, to give just another example of the process at work. As the Asian Development Bank (2015, pp. 249–50) has noted recently, since 2010, '[g]rowth was broad based, with investments in

finance, construction, and transport leading the trend ...'. The drift of population from eastern and northern Fiji, first to the west and south and then to urban and peri-urban areas, is to a substantial extent an effect of these widespread forms of industrialisation.

Even if SODELPA attracted the great majority of Taukei votes, that would give it victory by only a narrow margin. When the votes of the non-indigenous population (around 40 per cent of the total) are also taken into account, SODELPA's stance on the 'respect for all religious faiths and religious freedom' appeared as little more than an opportunistic move to broaden the party's electoral appeal because the Taukei vote alone would be insufficient to ensure victory. Disarray among the leadership of the Methodist Church, with some sections clearly wedded to the initial SODELPA cause of a 'Christian state' while others attempted to avoid continuing conflict with the government, only helped FijiFirst's campaign to tie SODELPA to its past no matter how the final party manifesto glossed over religious fundamentalism. Not surprisingly, Prime Minister Bainimarama and FijiFirst made much of the SODELPA leadership's past statements and the party's heritage to show the confusion within its ranks over its position on secularism in general and Christianity in particular.

Another signature component of SODELPA's position was its stance regarding land. Once again, this provided the party with both an important strength and a fundamental weakness. SODELPA's leadership constantly attacked the Bainimarama Government and the 2013 Constitution for undermining indigenous rights, claiming that by abrogating the 1997 Constitution, the entrenched protection of native land rights had been removed. One specific objection was that without a Senate, and the representation afforded the GCC through this body, all that was required to change Taukei land ownership in the new unicameral legislature was a simple majority vote in parliament. While debate on the accuracy of this claim raged during the campaign (SODELPA 2014b; FijiFirst 2014), other matters regarding land were probably more important in determining voting behaviour.

While SODELPA's stance was undoubtedly effective in securing the votes of Taukei who still farmed land and others who had left the land but remained attached to rural life in some form, such voters had become a declining proportion of the population. Other Taukei were domiciled in villages but employed in wage and salaried positions at

tourist resorts and urban centres. Still, others grew crops for urban markets and purchased industrial commodities for consumption. While commercialisation in all forms transformed the meaning of land rights beyond what may be described as traditional production for immediate non-marketed consumption, often described as subsistence farming, these changes also affected how SODELPA was forced to frame its defence of 'native land rights'. In so doing, the party also had to appear inclusive of Indo-Fijian farmers leasing land and to include poverty reduction, education and state services in its proposed policies. SODELPA was forced to shift its terrain and compete directly with FijiFirst as the incumbent government.

The SODELPA defence of indigenous land rights became primarily about the commercial terms of land occupation and ownership, as well as the needs of both Taukei and Indo-Fijians displaced from land ownership, occupation and cultivation (SODELPA 2014b, pp. 21–22, 43–47). Commencing with the usual obligatory reference to the 1874 Deed of Cession as the basis for Taukei monopoly of land ownership, SODELPA's manifesto proceeded to list all the actions of the Bainimarama Government that had purportedly undermined these. The list included appointing government sympathisers to staff the Native Land Trust Board (NTLB, now iTaukei Land Trust Board) and the opposition to the Qarase government's Qoliqoli Bill dealing with the ownership of coastal areas, including those used for surfing. The manifesto also made clear that its principal objection was to the transfer of control over native lands away from the chiefs, manifested in the GCC, to the minister. As noted above, this move by the Bainimarama Government, carried out via decree, had potentially serious implications for the amount and distributions of land rents that previously went to the chiefly aristocracy. SODELPA's role as the party of rentiers became clearly apparent.

Along with 'restor(ing) the protection of native land to what it has been since 1970', SODELPA also saw a need to attract leaseholders, including the mainly Indo-Fijian cane farmers, and to expand the number of people willing to farm increasing amounts of unutilised or underutilised land. A SODELPA government proposed to deal with this problem in concert with an NLTB in which control was once again vested in chiefs, and which would acquire land and lease it to farmers. In order to prevent farmers from avoiding rent payments, these payments would become 'a first charge on the proceeds of the

farm', presumably by the expansion of state supervisory capacities over agricultural production. That this proposal collided with other sections of the manifesto, which objected to government intrusion into other areas of the economy, including those dealing with jobs and economic growth (SODELPA 2014a, pp. 14–17), made the document typical of election propaganda in capitalist economies.

When coupled with the leadership of chiefs and with commercial buccaneers, however, the sections of the SODELPA manifesto dealing with religion and land rights clearly identified the party's central concerns. The particular matters that dominated the manifesto, as well as the conduct of the election campaign along the lines outlined by Dr Tupeni Baba below, left the Prime Minister and FijiFirst in a powerful position to appeal to voters as representative of a superior, inclusive civic nationalism. SODELPA, by comparison, represented a particularistic nationalism associated with chiefly rule, the primacy of rural life and Christian dominance, even monopoly, which extended to an attack on secularism understood in terms of the neutrality of the state in matters of religion.

What does the future hold for SODELPA?

On screen during the election night TV coverage, one of SODELPA's designated urban candidates, Dr Tupeni Baba, discussed some early voting figures with Dr Steven Ratuva, Fiji One's principal commentator. Baba, who had tasted electoral victory in 1987 and 1999 with the Fiji Labour Party and subsequent failure with other parties, enthused about the seeming success of SODELPA's campaign strategy. Early results suggested that behind the two main leaders, FijiFirst's Bainimarama and SODELPA's Ro Teimumu Kepa, other SODELPA candidates were prominent in the count and doing better than candidates from other parties, especially FijiFirst. Baba proudly categorised the initial results as an indication that the strategy of selecting candidates, particularly chiefs and others with strong local followings was trumping FijiFirst's preferred direction of concentrating attention on the party leader, Bainimarama. He clearly believed that local identities and particularisms were being favoured by voters over the national unity slogans of the FijiFirst campaign. Ratuva wisely

suggested caution in anticipating possible outcomes at a time when Bainimarama was already garnering many more votes than Kepa and all other candidates.

When the votes were finally tallied, Ratuva's caution proved sounder than Baba's enthusiasm. Bainimarama gained over 202,000 of the total number of valid votes of 496,364. Kepa, in second position, received 49,000 votes, less than a quarter of Bainimarama's total. Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, also of FijiFirst, finished in third place with 13,753 votes. With NFP leader Biman Prasad fourth, and another four of the first 12 successful candidates coming from FijiFirst, the SODELPA strategy outlined by Baba did not appear highly successful. Once votes were distributed according to the proportional representation method employed for the first time in this election, the redistribution of surpluses gained by Bainimarama, Sayed-Khaiyum and other leading FijiFirst candidates meant the party had 32 members elected, compared to SODELPA's 15. Baba added to the 'unsuccessful candidate' tally, gaining a mere 1,153 votes and finishing 62nd overall when the final parliament of 50 seats was determined.

At first glance, the outcome might appear to be a fairly predictable triumph for a leader and a party that campaigned on the basis that it was the 'party of every common Fijian'. That FijiFirst was constituted as the means for transforming a military dictatorship into an elected government under a constitution formulated by that dictatorship did not seem as significant as the fact that almost 60 per cent of the voters supported the party. Since FijiFirst had also become the clear favourite of many substantial firms and commercial figures, their funding support enabled the party to outspend its opponents many times over. Such funding is now a standard feature of elections in many capitalist democracies.

SODELPA therefore lost out to a party in power that had been able to draw on significant commercial support as well as on the resources of the state machinery, including the army, over the preceding five to eight years to effectively buy votes. Even the overwhelming vote from among military personnel for FijiFirst, possibly over 80 per cent of the votes cast at military polling stations, could be explained by increased

salaries and wages and better working and living conditions.³ Faced with this centralised concentration of power, the only hope SODELPA had was to run a decentralised campaign, counting upon localised support and putting up candidates who best fitted this strategy. In his pronouncement on TV, Baba was simply expressing a wish, rather than a solidly grounded expectation, that the only alternative open to SODELPA would work.

Any separation between local and national campaigns, however, is too simple for several reasons. FijiFirst, particularly its leadership, also conducted a concentrated 'grassroots' campaign. The party had a slate of candidates, most of whom were Taukei. They were not high chiefs but rather former military officers and white-collar professionals. Party leaders, candidates and supporters visited rural areas constantly, while government programs concentrated on improving roads, bridges and health and education facilities in both urban and rural areas. The government, in the form of FijiFirst, also 'thought local and acted local'. It would therefore be simplistic to portray the elections as a clash between parochialism, especially of a rural 'old' past and a 'new' non-racial or multiethnic nationalism, even if this appeared to be the central thrust of FijiFirst's campaign.

SODELPA, too, was forced to devise an election program, as evidenced in its manifesto, that presented it as a suitable national government in the rapidly changing circumstances of post-2006 Fiji. However, in a Fiji where much has changed over the last decade, and where there is a large increase not just in the number of young people but also in the number of young people who had never voted before, FijiFirst, and to a lesser extent the National Federation Party, were better placed to represent those changes.

3 A rough estimate using figures provided by the Fijian Electoral Commission of votes cast at polling stations used by military personnel suggests that FijiFirst gained in excess of 80 per cent of the votes cast. However, there are too many unknowns about these figures for a hard and fast conclusion to be drawn; more research is required into a number of matters, including to what extent voting was secret, whether only military personnel voted at these stations and to what extent prior directions were given by senior officers about how other ranks should vote. During informal discussions with young voters prior to the elections, one consistent theme was the appeal of parties, FijiFirst and the NFP in particular, who had highly educated, university-qualified candidates, including those with doctorates. Making Fiji an 'education hub' for the south-west Pacific is only likely to see this feature of candidates become even more prominent in the future.

Conclusion

By some accounts, and hopes, Fiji's democracy has been 'reconstructed', with parliamentary government once again in place. From an optimistic perspective, Fiji's democracy will now revolve steadily around a regular party competition conducted within a set of constitutional rules, with one or more parties forming government and with a formal opposition similarly composed of one or more parties. In the context of the 2014 result, SODELPA are the losers this time but did well enough against considerable odds. Fifteen seats out of 50 and nearly 30 per cent of the vote is a substantial base upon which to build in anticipation of the next elections.

There are several reasons, however, why some caution should be exercised by those who expect, even hope, that electoral and parliamentary democracy will be the principal trajectory of Fiji's political future. This was also how the 1999 elections result was greeted. Instead, as pointed out soon after the 1999 elections (MacWilliam 2001),⁴ and again recently (MacWilliam 2014), Fiji remains a militarised democracy with its Constitution, parliament and elections underpinned by a compressed connection between members of the military apparatus and other occupants of government positions who hold the apex of both political and state power. While the leadership of the military has passed from the chiefly families who tied political power to state power in the first decades of independence, military authority is still critical to how the ruling class in Fiji rules. Even as the current Prime Minister and important elected members of his government, as well as senior bureaucrats, have 'retired' from the military positions they held previously, the importance of their successors in the RFMF for the government's power remains. In this sense, the connection between the military and the other apparatuses of state power remains compressed. Fiji continues to be distinct from some other electoral democracies where military power is less overt, even though critical for the exercise of political and state power.

4 The near-universal enthusiasm for the 1997 Constitution and the holding of the 1999 elections is undoubted and does not need documentation. Instead MacWilliam's analysis (2001) developed within months of the elections was regarded at the time as 'controversial' and 'sceptical' by Stewart Firth (2001, p. 7). Readers can judge if after the 1999 elections, and now again after the 2014 elections, Fiji's democracy was and is 'thin' and 'militarised'. Also see Lal (2007) who also used the term 'militarized democracy' to refer to Fiji's post-2006 coup political governance.

Optimism about SODELPA's future, as either an opposition party that retains coherence and significance across more than one election, or as a future governing party, needs to be tempered by the factors outlined above. SODELPA remains the organising centre for a chiefly aristocracy that is in the process of being permanently disempowered by industrialisation and commercialisation. Rentiers are under attack everywhere, not only in Fiji, by advocates of land reform, who view rentiers as an undesirable form of the wider class of accumulators. The substantial areas of 'vacant' land across the country suggest that a major shift is taking place in the role of agriculture—whether this sector can be revitalised and further industrialised remains to be seen. However, should such reforms take place, land rents are likely to become a lesser component of farm production costs, further undercutting chiefly incomes and authority. Even if other *mataqali* members receive a greater proportion of rents as a result of the government reforms noted above, a generalised attack on rents will further cut into the amounts received by chiefs and others. The response of *mataqali* members to any reduction in the total they receive, even if is a greater proportion of a smaller total, is unlikely to strengthen chiefly authority either. In this context, it is also worth noting that even if some workers are pushed back into the countryside as farm labourers or smallholders, their existence will not be one of so-called subsistence, but of labour further subject to capital, entirely dependent upon profitability. Chiefly attempts to impose authority will be in competition with commercial criteria.

The political future of the chiefly aristocracy is no brighter as long as the close ties between the elected government and the military leadership remain. As the events of 2000 and 2006 suggest, these ties are critical. With senior military officers less and less drawn from the highest chiefly stratum, it is unlikely that the RFMF can be mobilised to support the aristocracy's demands for a return to greater authority. Further, any revolt in the countryside led by chiefs in the areas where SODELPA's support remains strongest is not likely to succeed, as the military's close attention to rural concerns prior to the recent election suggest.

Given the extremely challenging procedures for constitutional change entrenched in the 2013 Constitution, it is unlikely that future elections in Fiji will be conducted under terms more favourable for SODELPA. The 2014 election result appears likely to be the high-water mark for

the party dominated by high chiefs, particular rural concerns and the Taukei buccaneers who were once prominent. How the attachment between political and state power represented by FijiFirst, the military and leading commercial firms will be played out is of course uncertain. But the greater possibility is that the old guard represented by SODELPA in the 2014 election cannot reinvent itself as representative of the rapidly urbanising and commercialised population that inhabits Fiji now.

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