'The Pacific Way'—Consociational Politics in Fiji

R. S. Milne

This article attempts to apply the concept of "consociationalism" (originally devised to explain politics in some smaller European countries, notably the Netherlands) to a developing country, Fiji. The leading exponent of the concept, Arend Lijphart, is himself from the Netherlands. His original (in every sense) study, The Politics of Accommodation, constituted an explanation of how the Netherlands functioned as a stable democracy in spite of the existence of cleavages in the society which were regarded by many political scientists as conducive to instability. He emphasized the behaviour of elites in societies such as the Netherlands, where there was indeed a minimum of agreement on fundamentals but also a lack of a comprehensive political consensus. There could still be stability if the leaders were convinced of the desirability of preserving the system and were able to co-operate with each other, without alienating their respective followers. Consociational democracy was described as "government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with fragmented political culture into a stable democracy." Since then Lijphart has generalized from the experience of other European countries, mostly the smaller democracies, Switzerland and Austria. Other writers have also considered examples of consociation from "developed" countries.

---

1 The author is indebted to Dr. John Chick and Dr. Ahmed Ali of the University of the South Pacific for their help during his visit to Fiji in 1974. He is also grateful for financial assistance given by the American Philosophical Society and the President's Research Fund, University of British Columbia.


The question arises: why should the concept of consociation not be extended to developing countries? "... Linguistic-ethnic cleavages are becoming increasingly important. There is no logical reason why consociational techniques cannot be used to resolve this type of conflict... The consociational techniques which helped some of the smaller European nations make the transition to modernity in relative peace and stability would certainly be applicable, mutatis mutandis, to the problems of developing nations such as Malaysia, Nigeria or India. Actually, not much has been published along these lines, the main exception being an article by Edward Dew, which applies consociationalism very perceptively to Surinam. In point of fact, it may not be too easy to apply consociational theory profitably to developing countries with linguistic-ethnic cleavages. It has been percieptibly observed that communal cleavages are more likely to be salient and more intractable than class conflicts, more difficult to manage and more likely to provoke violence. The salience of communal cleavages in many developing countries might entail considerable amendment to consociational theory or stretch it to a point where the costs of application outweighed the benefits.

A preliminary observation may be made. In the often-quoted European examples consociational arrangements usually take the form of coalitions. This need not be invariably so; agreement may be less explicit and still have some consociational aspects, as seems to have been the case in Fiji.

Some information on the social and political background in Fiji is in order. Racially, at the beginning of 1972, over 90 percent of the population belonged to one of two groups, Indian or Fijian. Indians made up 51 percent, Fijians 43 percent, while the remainder, in descending numerical order, were classified as Other Islanders, Part-European, Chinese, and European. Nearly all Fijians are Christians; the bulk of the Indians are Hindus, with smaller numbers of Muslims and Christians. Language cleavages also exist, although elites share a common language (English) which is also the official language. Occupationally, commerce, if not conducted by foreign firms, is Indian-controlled,
Consociational Politics in Fiji

and the role of Fijians is negligible. The relationship of Fijians to the
land, mostly in the form of group ownership, and the existence of a
system of chiefs has done much to "shelter" them and cut them off
from interaction with others. Although cleavages exist between racial
groups, the groups themselves are not monolithic, and regional and
other differences must be taken into account. "Indians" are divided,
for example, according to place of origin, or ancestors' origin, in India
and the type of religion they follow (inside the broad categories of
"Hindu" or "Muslim"). The ties between Fijians living in different
regions of Fiji may be relatively weak. Relations between Indians and
Fijians in various parts of the country depend on historical factors,
such as the degree of interaction with colonial officials before
Independence, or with type of employment and degree of co-operation
or conflict between employers and employed. All these considera-
tions are relevant. What remains true is that political allegiance is
highly dependent on race, and that race is vastly more important than
class as a determinant of voting.

The party system reflects the main racial cleavages. The Alliance
Party, modelled on the Malaysian Alliance, has three wings—the Fi-
jian Association, the Indian Alliance and the General Electors' As-


of receiving benefits from the “government” party. The Alliance collects about 75 percent of the General Electors’ vote. Under almost any electoral system, therefore, the Alliance, whose backbone is the Fijian Association, would win a majority. However, because of the Fijians’ inferiority in numbers to the Indians and their fears that under an orthodox electoral system their economic disadvantages might be compounded by a lack of clear political supremacy, the system of voting is partly by communal groups, which reinforces the strength of the Alliance in the legislature.12

The exact system of voting has varied and will probably change again soon. In 1972 each voter was allowed four votes, one to be cast in a “communal” constituency for a representative of his own race, and three to be cast in “national” constituencies—one for a candidate from each of the three main racial groups. Both Indians and Fijians (plus Other Islanders) were allocated 12 communal and 10 national seats; the “General” groups (the remainder) were given 3 communal and 5 national seats. Under this arrangement the vote of the general electors is greatly overweighted. Alliance superiority in seats to the NFP is therefore the result of (1) the Fijian vote being less split than the Indian vote; (2) its greater share of the general vote; (3) the greater weight accorded to the general vote. Consequently, in 1972 the Alliance won 33 seats to the NFP’s 19. No clear voting trends were apparent from the 1972 results, as compared with 1966 when the Alliance had a majority of 25 to 9 in the elected seats. In 1972 the NFP had rather less success in attracting Fijian votes than expected. There may have been some marginal shift in support from NFP to Alliance among Indians, but this took the form of a switch by a few businessmen rather than of a movement which would stand out in a statistical analysis.13

The elections of 1972 took place in a non-contentious atmosphere, in striking contrast to the by-elections of 1968 which were held after a boycott of the legislature by the NFP members for the Indian communal seats. Although the NFP vote did not greatly increase at the by-elections, the Alliance had believed that its Indian candidates would do better and might even win some of the seats. When it was announced that they had won none, there was intense chagrin in the Alliance, accusations of “treachery” on the part of Indian voters, and

---

a series of Fijian meetings which produced strongly-worded statements.\textsuperscript{14} Although the amount of actual violence was small, there was considerable threat of violence. The change in atmosphere since then reflects a change in the relation between party leaders, which acquired some “consociational” aspects.

The rapprochement between the parties was partly due to the talks between them preceding Independence (achieved in October 1970). The relatively uncompromising Mr. A. D. Patel, leader of the NFP, was interested in the possibility of Independence and was sufficiently concerned over the aftermath of the 1968 by-elections to take part in discussions with the Alliance leaders.\textsuperscript{15} The journal associated with the NFP mentioned Independence as a factor making for agreement. The concurrence of the parties that the Alliance leader, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, should become Prime Minister on Independence without any appeal to the electorate, was referred to by that journal as “a supreme act of coalition.”\textsuperscript{16} Alliance leaders agreed that Patel played an influential part in these negotiations.\textsuperscript{17} The same article mentions that in 1969 each of the parties fought for a similar objective—to have a contract drawn up that would benefit the sugar-farmers in their dispute with the Australian-based South Pacific Sugar Mills. Later, when the Government took over the operations of that company after it decided to withdraw from Fiji, dissension among groups of sugar farmers, which had been reflected in politics, was largely removed, and sugar was thus “taken out of politics.”

Although Patel was not un receptive to dealing with the Alliance, closer ties between the two party leaders did not come until later. His successor, S. M. Koya, although naturally ebullient, was more of a compromiser.\textsuperscript{18} Unlike Patel, who was India-born and a Hindu, he was Fiji-born and a Muslim. In the legislature, when tempers had cooled after the by-elections but before Patel’s death, he made an overture to the Alliance which could hardly fail to appeal to the Fijians’ attachment to their traditions. He moved that the Government should find ways to renovate the island of Bau and preserve its his-

\textsuperscript{14} E.g. “No further abuse levelled against Fijian chiefs and traditions by the Federation Party will be tolerated, as from now” (\textit{Fiji Times}, 13 September, 1968); “Should racial strife break out in the colony, the Federation Party will be held fully responsible for it” (\textit{ibid.}, 17 September 1968).
\textsuperscript{15} Vasil, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 34, fn. 39.
\textsuperscript{17} Ratu D. Toganivalu, quoted in \textit{The Fiji Nation} (Alliance-affiliated), Vol. 1, No. 11 (October 1969).
\textsuperscript{18} Vasil, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35, contrasts his line during the pre-Independence talks with that of the tougher NFP leaders, Mr. K. C. Ramrakha and Mrs. Jai Narayan.
Pacific Affairs

torical riches and monuments. The chief Minister, Ratu Mara, welcomed the motion as a sign of understanding between the races, and Mr. Koya reciprocated by saying, "The motion, I feel, has drawn the two sides of the House much nearer than they were ever before. . . . I hope and trust that the spirit will continue."21 The change in Opposition leaders constituted enough of a breakthrough for Ratu Mara to say to a U.N. committee, "It was not until October of last year when my friend Koya became the Leader of the Opposition that a new line of communication opened up."20

The most obvious change concerned the possibility of a coalition, although this had been mooted, less specifically, before.21 Accounts of the sequence of events do not always agree. Apparently, however, Ratu Mara mentioned the idea more than once to Mr. Koya as his own personal idea, not the party's. Koya's reactions were mixed. He was originally favourable, it seems, but had reservations about what would happen to his existing post as "Leader of the Opposition" and was also worried in case a coalition would create an opening for a new party, possibly a Labour Party. The question of coalition was taken up officially in the NFP, and at its 1971 Lautoka Convention was rejected by a substantial majority. After the election Ratu Mara lost interest. One of his motives had been to get more Indians into the Cabinet. In 1971 the Cabinet contained only one Indian, from the Indian Alliance, and the remaining material available from that quarter was not promising. After the 1972 election some able newly elected Indian Alliance men were put in the Cabinet, so the problem was resolved.22 The situation became a little more confused when the Prime Minister seemed to be advocating a coalition government which would also be a one-party government. In Western countries, he argued, a two-party system entailed a division along the lines capital-labour, but in countries such as Trinidad, Guyana, Mauritius or Fiji, the result of two-party government was to "divide along the existing dividing lines which are race."23 However, a few weeks later he main-

21 E.g., see ibid., 5 May 1973. Also, at the end of 1968 the Alliance (party newspaper) said that there had been fewer signs of aggressiveness in the Legislative Council and that the Chief Minister had indicated that maybe "the Opposition could join the government in power as has been done in some other territories" (Vol. 1, No. 11, 18 December 1968).
23 Fiji Times, 4 March 1972; Pacific Islands Monthly, January 1972, p. 34.
Consociational Politics in Fiji

tained that, although he was in favour of a coalition, he was against one-party government and that the two were incompatible.24

The moves for a coalition came to nothing, but relations between the leaders of the two parties were good in the early 1970's, lasting even beyond the 1972 election. A Legislative Council member who had left the Alliance observed that the country had "a coalition government in all but name."25 The Pacific Review reported that the Opposition had faced charges that it no longer existed because of the extreme co-operation it had given the Government.26 The Prime Minister said that discussions with the Opposition would continue after the election and that the Leader of the Opposition agreed with this.27 A striking example of the "cosy relationship" between the two men, almost constituting a "private government,"28 occurred late in 1973: shortly before the poll in a by-election which the NFP was contesting Mr. Koya lavished praise on Ratu Mara and asked rhetorically where the country would be if the Opposition were to fight the Prime Minister, as occurred in some other countries?29 Consultations were reported to be continuing in early 1974.30 They were still taking place early in 1975, but the imminent meeting of the Royal Commission on the electoral system (August 1975) threatened to bring up the contentious issue of common roll and perhaps to diminish informal consultation, at least in that sphere.

In estimating Fiji's degree of conformity to a consociational model, there is difficulty in knowing exactly what the model is. Even if reference is made only to Lijphart, he has used different terminology on different occasions.31 It is proposed here to take certain features of consociationalism mentioned by him and to divide them into three groups, in ascending order of interest. The first group does not seem

24 Fiji Times, 29 March 1972.
27 Pacific Islands Monthly, January 1972, p. 35.
28 Fiji Times, 17 June 1972.
29 Ibid., 17 November 1973. Part of Koya's enthusiasm was because there had been a split in the Alliance over the nomination of their candidate, and he did not want the Mara-backed candidate to lose, because this would have weakened the Prime Minister's standing in his party. That candidate was also, communally, less pro-Fijian.
30 Pacific Review, 7 March 1974. It seems that over the whole period the range covered was greater than that formally required by the Constitution, for example on subjects such as appointments to the Election Commission.
31 For instance, in The Politics of Accommodation, op. cit., he talks of unwritten "rules" (pp. 122-137). In "Typologies of Democratic Systems," op. cit., he refers to "prerequisites" as regards the leaders and to "favourable conditions" (pp. 64-72). The features of the consociational model listed here are all to be found, in varying forms, in Lijphart's writings, and will all be referred to as "features."
very relevant to Fiji, or possibly even to some other developing countries. It includes: popular attitudes favourable to Government by Grand Coalition,32 moderate nationalism (some degree of commitment to the system at mass level); a low load on the system.33 The features in the second group, discussed briefly in the following paragraphs, do indeed seem relevant to Fiji without much amendment. The elites must: (1) have the ability to recognize the dangers of non-co-operation; (2) be committed to the maintenance of the system; (3) be able to maintain contact and communication so as to transcend the system's challenges; (4) be able to devise workable solutions in the form of "rules of the game" or institutional arrangements.

The third group seem to relate to Fiji, but not quite in their original form. Some reformulation is therefore suggested, which may increase their applicability to developing countries. The features are: (5) the prime importance of elite agreement reached via summit diplomacy; (6) distinct lines of cleavage between subcultures or groups; (7) the ability of leaders to take their followers along with them when they attempt co-operation with other elites; (8) multiple balance of power among the subcultures, as opposed to a bi-polar one; (9) the existence of external threats.

The first feature of the second group (the elites' ability to recognize the dangers of non-co-operation) is evident from the reactions to the danger of violence which followed the 1968 by-elections. A single quotation from the Prime Minister will make the point. He referred to the "... days when we sailed so close to the rocks; ... we came so near to the edge of the abyss that we could see with unmistakable clearness the dangers that lay there if we did not change course. So we changed course. ... Let us not forget too easily those dangerous days, lest we recklessly find ourselves back in the same position".34 The attraction of the idea of a one-party state also arose from a desire to avoid racial violence. It is evident, too, that in the NFP Mr. Koya (and previously Mr. Patel) recognized the dangers of non-co-operation.

The elites were also committed to the maintenance of the system,

---

32 A coalition of parties or groups larger than is necessary for the winning and maintenance of political power, but not necessarily inclusive of all parties or groups in the society (Lijphart, "Typologies of Democratic Systems," op. cit., pp. 60-63).
33 The first of these is unlikely to exist except as a result of willingness to follow leaders (see feature no. 7, later). The second, also, will probably be present only via attachment to leaders. It is relevant in a negative form: the system should be regarded as legitimate in the sense that there is not actual disaffection. In considering the third, the load must be compared with capability, and the feature is therefore hard to measure. Unambiguous examples of "overloading" seem to result from possible deficiencies in economic capability, almost irrespective of commitments.
34 Pacific Review, 7 September 1972.
Consociational Politics in Fiji

the second of this group of features. No doubt the NFP would have
preferred some changes, for instance in methods of election, but it did
not prefer separation from the system to the maintenance of existing
ties. The possibility of partition was never an issue.

The establishment of lines of communication between the elites
has been mentioned earlier. The most frequent means of communi-
cation between Mara and Koya was apparently the telephone. It
should be noted that in Fiji “communication between elites” applied
overwhelmingly only to the top man in each party, although there
were one or two possible exceptions among other members of the
political elite.

The parties’ leaders have made some limited advances towards
devising rules of the game or institutional arrangements (no. 4). They
were successful in reaching agreement on the new “Independence”
Constitution. However, no “solution” was found to the problem of an
electoral system for Fiji; the matter was simply postponed. Even at
the euphoric pre-Independence Legislative Council Debates in June
1970, a divergence of views on the introduction of common roll was evi-
dent. Koya denied that the NFP had abandoned it, but Alliance
members with shouts of denial interrupted a member who said that
the only issue left open for discussion about common roll was the
timing. Neither has the issue of easier rental of land for Indians (and
others) been resolved; by party agreement, it was not discussed at the
London pre-Independence Conference, and during the 1972 election
references to it showed restraint. At another level (agreeing to in-
stitutional arrangements) there were some moves towards a roughly
proportional allocation of benefits and duties, such as would occur in
a formal coalition. Information on this topic is scanty. Nevertheless,
not only have NFP members been appointed to committees of the
legislature, some of which have advisory functions (as they are entitled
to have as Members of Parliament) but the party was also asked to
send representatives to the United States and London for negotiations
on sugar. Koya was also invited to attend some EEC talks in Brussels
along with the Prime Minister, another minister and an agricultural
economist. Other benefits are believed to have accrued to Opposition

35 Vasil, op. cit., p. 36. A Royal Commission was to be set up “after the next general election
and before the second election” (that is, by 1977) to study, and make recommendations on,
future methods of election. Common roll was to be used for elections to the Suva and Lautoka
councils; this was implemented by the Local Government Act of 1972. The Commission, under
the Chairmanship of Professor Street, was to meet in Fiji in August 1975.
members from the closer relations between the two party leaders, but they have not been publicized, nor apparently institutionalized.

The third group of features needs more elaboration. The cardinal importance of elite agreement is emphasized in Lijphart’s *The Politics of Accommodation*. Daalder has pointed out that the success of consociationalism in some European countries has been possible only because of a history of co-operation among elites, which has produced a special elite culture. If it is absent, the fact that elites, at a certain “critical juncture of a nation’s history,” may intelligently choose to attempt a consociational arrangement, will not save them from encountering great difficulties. Many new states, he says, do have pluralist traditions, but present-day elites see these as obstacles to modernization.\(^39\) If this is so, then attempts at consociation in a developing country will depend to an even greater extent than in developed countries on the personalities of, and relations between, leaders.

Ratu Mara’s personality is admirably adapted to consociationalism, especially in a racially bipolar state. He enjoys the respect of Indians as well as Fijians, has had Hindi poems written about him, and at a 1972 election rally was greeted with the slogan, “Victory to the Mahatma Gandhi of the Pacific!”\(^40\) The best evidence of his consociational skills is provided by the record of squabbles which occur between parties during his absences from the country, notably the tangle in the House of Representatives in April 1973, which brought in question the authority of the Speaker.\(^41\) Mr. Koya’s skills are not quite of the same order, but he has worked hard to back up Ratu Mara’s efforts. The concern of the two leaders to work together has already been indicated. Additionally, however, pluralist traditions do seem to have an influence on the conduct of politics in Fiji. The Prime Minister has remarked of political traditions in general, “I am always amused when people come to the islands and talk about politics as if this was something new or something we had to learn. Politics themselves are as old as man and well known in the islands.”\(^42\) He is fond of using the phrase “The Pacific Way,” and speaking of Fiji’s foreign policy, he observed that it was based on respect for human beings,” … which obliges us not to condemn outright but to sit down and talk so that there can be better under-

---

40 *Fiji Times*, 28 April 1972.
41 Also the recriminations in the House over land leases in June 1974.
Consociational Politics in Fiji

standing which can lead to tolerance and goodwill. This has been projected as The Pacific Way.” On another occasion he actually identified the phrase with consociational arrangements. “Asked if a bipartisan approach to national issues would continue, the Prime Minister commented: ‘It is to me the Pacific Way and I believe in it.’

Vague as the phrase is, it does reflect a tradition of dialogue and discussion in politics, exemplified in the transfer of the traditional ya-qona (kava) ceremony to the informal proceedings of Parliament. More specifically, Fijian history contains examples of elite agreement which provided for the satisfaction, if not the enlightenment, of followers. Before the coming of the Europeans, chiefs, in their wars, “... would attack a stronghold with every gesture of hatred and ferocity, having secretly warned the defenders to retire to safety. The empty village would be burnt, the common people would return satisfied even if they sometimes wondered, and the chiefs’ secret understanding would pave the way to future alliance.” Another, non-traditional experience of elites co-operating in government was via the working of the “Member” system under the British.

The second feature in this group (distinct lines of cleavage among subcultures) operates differently in developing societies with racial cleavages than in most developed societies. Lijphart’s point is that, if this condition is fulfilled, contact among subcultures will be limited and the possibility of conflict thereby reduced. In developing societies with racial divisions, initially contact between groups may be small. Settlements of different races may be largely separated geographically, with interaction taking the form of trading. However, such cleavages are too distinct to be healthy: the races are so divided by appearance, religion, language and so on that racial stereotypes are current and are used by politicians to create or increase conflict. Race tends to dominate politics; this is the whole point about racially-divided societies, which makes politics potentially so explosive. When modernization takes place competition in the economic sphere occurs and, combined with existing stereotypes, may be perceived largely in racial terms. Such conflicting economic interests already exist in Fiji.

43 News From Fiji, 22 December 1971.
44 Ibid., 3 May 1972.
46 Which latterly produced a kind of “coalition,” when Ratu Mara and A. D. Patel were two of the Members (Ratu Mara, Fiji Times, 25 June 1971).
"The Indians have a conflict of interest with the Fijians, not only because they need more land but also because, even without particularly strong competition in the advanced sector, there would not be sufficient opportunities to go round." Divisions among subcultures are still fairly distinct, but the situation is changing. Immigration to the capital, Suva, is increasing and is bound to result in greater competition for jobs between members of different races, for instance in the civil service.

The next feature (no. 7) is the ability of elites who attempt cooperation with other elites to take their followers along with them without losing support. Clearly, leaders may influence their followers by their example. If they behave with dignity and respect towards each other in Parliament, such conduct may filter down to the grass roots and be imitated there. However, this could be a long-term process and in the interim the leaders may be accused of "selling out" the communities which they are viewed as representing. Both Ratu Mara and Mr. Koya faced this kind of accusation. If leaders are believed to have sold out, they are liable to face "outbidding" and their less extreme position on ethnic issues, exemplified in their consociational stance, may be outbid by others who take up a more extreme stance. In most developing societies, this feature is affected by the previous one. Cleavages are relatively distinct, so clientèles are sharply determined; evidence of co-operation is therefore obvious, and outbidders are ready to step forward.

Ratu Mara's personal ascendancy in his party is almost absolute. It is inconceivable that important, or maybe even unimportant, party decisions would be taken in his absence. The Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act, 1966, which gave some protection for tenants and therefore was of benefit to some Indians, was put into law through his efforts and against the initial opposition of many leaders in the Fijian Association. Apparently he did not consult his own party formally when he approached Mr. Koya about coalition, but it is thought that, if coalition had been acceptable to the NFP and he had advocated

---

48 E. K. Fisk, The Political Economy of Independent Fiji (Canberra, 1970). He goes on to list the conflict among other combinations of racial groups.
52 Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, Politics in Plural Societies; A Theory of Democratic Instability (Columbus, Ohio, 1972), pp. 82-83.
54 Fiji Times, 24 April 1972.
Consociational Politics in Fiji

it, his party would have agreed. However, there were limits to even Ratu Mara’s control of his party. At the Fijian Association Convention in 1970 he supported a motion calling for a letter of appreciation to be sent to the NFP for the part they had played at the London Constitutional Conference, yet the motion was defeated.56 A more serious result of his attempts at co-operation was the breakaway of an assistant minister in the Government, Mr. S. B. Butadroka, who after being expelled from the Alliance founded the Fijian Nationalist Party, which is still in existence. Some of Butadroka’s grievances were particular, for instance the allocation of more funds to certain rural areas, but others concerned the position of the Fijians in society as a whole, for example the provision of facilities to equip them to enter business, more jobs in the civil service,56 the guarantee of a two-thirds Fijian majority in Parliament, and so on. The nature of Butadroka’s appeal, which places it clearly in the “outbidding” category, is plain from the party motto, “Fiji for the Fijians.”

Koya’s situation was more shaky, and he lacked the firm control over the party exercised by his predecessor, Patel. Also, quite apart from any pursuit of co-operation from consociational motives, he had to make some appeal for Fijian votes if he was to change the image of the NFP as a mainly “Indian” party, which would make him vulnerable on the “Indian” side. The Fijian Association has had longer practice in this kind of manoeuvring and also had the advantage of using the “Alliance” device, which somewhat blurs ethnic aspects of politics. Soon after Koya became leader he survived a challenge from R. D. Patel, the late leader’s brother.57 His main rival inside the party was K. C. Ramrakha, who played the role of “internal outbidder.” In Mr. Koya’s favour was the circumstance that Indian businessmen, who constitute a main source of support for the party, welcomed a moderate, non-fanatical leader, who would not rock the boat.58 Also, although he had rivals in the party, they were not united behind any single alternative. An apparent source of weakness was actually one of his main strengths. Unlike most Indians in Fiji and most NFP supporters, he is a Muslim; if he were removed from the leadership, a high proportion of the pro-NFP Muslim votes would be withdrawn.

58 Ibid., Vol. 1, No. 16 (January 1970).
Mr. Koya has been more subject than Ratu Mara to attack because of his association with leaders of the other main racial group. His joint trips with the Prime Minister allegedly gave rise to the rumour that he was acting as secretary to Ratu Mara. The “NFP” Pacific Review asked whether any of the advice he had given Ratu Mara during ‘consultations’ had been accepted. Since the start of co-operation between the two party leaders, Koya has played the part of the statesman; the “deep approach” has replaced the “hot air,” which almost suggested personal instability. On occasions, however, his speeches have revealed some of his former fire. In 1974 he warned that if the Government continued to burden the poor with inflation and land problems, “we’ll close down Fiji altogether.” Almost a month later he produced two nooses in the House of Representatives and invited two Government members to hang themselves. A few days later he threatened to stop dialogue and co-operation with the Government, unless convinced it was not anti-Indian. Are such outbursts a sign that consociational arrangements are breaking down? Do they arise from pressures from within the NFP? Are they designed to satisfy followers rather after the fashion of the attacks on empty villages by the chiefs of former days?

The next feature (no. 8) which, according to Lijphart, is conducive to consociationalism, is a multiple balance of power among the subcultures, rather than a bipolar situation (two groups almost equal in power) or a hegemonic one (a single group dominant). A multiple balance of power is indeed possible in developing countries, as in Surinam. But the Fiji situation, like Guyana and Malaysia, is bipolar. The general electors do not hold a balance between the Fijian and Indian groups. Their balancing power would be very limited apart from the current electoral overweighting which they enjoy. They are also too closely aligned with the Fijians to be considered as a balance.

The Fijian version of consociationalism, which may exist in Guyana and Malaysia as well, is not one of balance. Rather, it is both bi-polar and hegemonic. Generally, it may be hypothesized that a

---

59 A. A. Awasthi, “Should NF Party go to Blazes? If ‘No’ What can we do to save it?” (paper distributed at the NFP Lautoka Convention, 1971, mimeo).
60 7 January 1974.
61 Fiji Times, 3 June 1974.
62 Ibid., 27 June 1974. Significantly, the two members concerned were Indian Alliance members, and Ratu Mara was out of Fiji at the time.
63 Ibid., 1 July 1974 and 5 July 1974.
64 See footnote 45 above.
Consociational Politics in Fiji

A racially bi-polar situation is so competitive that the most likely outcome is hegemony rather than balance. The premise on which consociationalism in Fiji rests is Fijian political predominance. So a prime feature of consociationalism in the "Western" sense, that no single group dominates the bargaining process, is absent. There is bargaining, and some concessions, but only within the limits acceptable to the major group. If the other group tries to go beyond these, it will be sharply reminded of the rules of the game.

Except during very heated disputes, such as those which followed the 1968 by-elections, Fijian hegemony is not asserted crudely. During the debate on Independence a Fijian minister rejected the idea previously advanced by Mr. Koya that, because the Fijian chiefs gave Fiji to Britain in 1874 by the Deed of Cession, the British, when they handed it back, had to do so to the Fijians alone. Nevertheless, in the inter-party talks on the Constitution, the Alliance insisted that the document should contain a definite reference to the Deed of Cession, which the Fijians "have always seen as a charter of their rights and position." The Fijians' underlying belief in their hegemony is well conveyed by a comment in The Fiji Nation. After remarking that the crux of the Independence question was a "representative balance" between Fijians and Indians, the magazine continued: "It is inconceivable that the Fijian community will agree to an arrangement which would not assure them of being the masters of their own destiny in their own country." The Fijian demonstrations of 1968, irrespective of whether or not they were an over-reaction to events, constituted a reassertion of Fijian predominance. By warning of the possibility of violence and calling for the withdrawal of concessions on land made to the Indians, they were not "violating the rules of the game." On the contrary, they drew attention, compellingly, to the existing rules, and reminded the Indians that they were still in force. Too-frequent reminders were deplored by Mr. Koya when he complained about

---

66 E.g. on land, the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act; on the electoral system, common roll for Suva and Lautoka.
70 Compare the statement by the Minister for Fijian Affairs (Ratu W. B. Toganivalu), after a dispute with the NFP in the House over land tenure, that he would not entertain any more applications for land leases, or renewals (Fiji Times, 27 June 1974).
those who simply said "that we would like such and such a thing to be done or else there would be a clash of races, that there will be war or violence." But regrets that there was no even balance of power were fruitless. When Fijians raised the possibility of violence, the warning was credible: clearly, Indians, who had more material goods than Fijians, had more to lose from violence.

When all this has been said, the rules of the game, although based on Fijian hegemony, are not illiberal, once off-limits have been defined. They do indeed embody a "Pacific Way." There is a real desire to have Indians represented in the Government and to associate them with decision-making. The rules should not be judged simply by comparison with European versions of consociationalism, but should be viewed in perspective after looking at the situation in some other developing countries and at the policies of Fijian outbidders, such as Mr. Butadroka.

Finally, Lijphart mentions external threats as conducive to consociationalism (no. 9). Fiji has not had any direct threat to its territory, but external factors in general have provided "functional equivalents." The process of attaining Independence may bring out differences between parties, but the main tendency is to form a temporary alliance against the colonial power, thus temporarily subordinating these differences. Fiji was no exception. It was stated earlier that the beginning of co-operation between the parties was aided by the approach of Independence. The parties were also able to work together for the sugar-farmers and against the equivalent of an external enemy, the South Pacific Sugar Mills. In spite of the dominant role of foreign firms in the economy of Fiji, both parties are too pro-capitalist to have joined together against them in any coherent way, although this might form a future basis for co-operation.

In a still wider sense, external factors may aid tendencies to consociationalism, not by bringing the parties together against an outside enemy, but by inducing them to work together positively in relation to the world beyond Fiji. The Fiji Government has been active in both the South Pacific Commission and Conference and in the South Pacific Forum of island leaders. In these activities it has allocated an important role to Indians. The Government has also cultivated close

---

74 Rabushka and Shepsle, op. cit., p. 74.
75 E.g. at the South Pacific Conference in Suva, September 1970, Mr. Koya was the chairman (technically in the shape of a United Kingdom High Commissioner), while Mr. Vijay Singh, Indian Alliance, was leader of the Fiji delegation (The Fiji Nation, Vol. 2, No. 31, September 1970).
Consociational Politics in Fiji

relations with India, even to the extent of the Prime Minister’s vigorously protesting against an editorial in the pro-Government Fiji Times which was highly critical of India.76 Favourable references to India in Parliament are often made by Government members, especially Ratu Mara, and ministers from India have visited Fiji, making it clear in speeches that people of Indian origin in Fiji owe their allegiance to Fiji. Such strategies have proved valuable in sweetening relations with the NFP, which is largely supported by Indian votes.

What does the foregoing signify? It would be hard to claim that Fiji ranked high on a consociational scale, even if Lijphart’s criteria were modified to meet conditions in developing countries with racial cleavages. No actual coalition was formed in Fiji, nor did negotiations about coalition progress far enough to indicate exactly what its formation would have entailed: What would have happened to the post of Leader of the Opposition? What would have been the fate of the Indian Alliance and its representation in the Cabinet? Would ideas about a one-party state have been pursued further? Even without a coalition, institutional arrangements between Government and Opposition about who was to get what were not clearly spelled out. It could be argued that the Opposition got very little, apart from representation on committees, trips, and, at the top level, “consultation.” Mr. Koya, because he was consulted, assumed some responsibility for Government policy without acquiring any authority. The NFP achieved its objectives as regards sugar, but from the party-politics angle it lost a prime issue. To “take sugar out of politics” was to take a large scoop of politics out of politics. The consociational arrangements also lacked depth; they scarcely operated below the level of the two party leaders. It would not be correct, however, to criticize the arrangements as being very restricted in time. To be sure, they owed their existence partly to the approach of Independence. But they survived the advent of Independence, and their persistence probably went some distance towards reinforcing traditional attitudes towards the desirability of reaching agreement, embodied in the phrase “The Pacific Way.” Lijphart has said that the degree of competition or co-operation between elites must be seen as a continuum, and that some elite relations are more consociational than others.77 Viewed in this light, politics in Fiji, although not conforming closely to a Western ideal type of consociationalism, has recently shown some undeniably consociational characteristics.

76 News From Fiji, 17 March 1971.
Pacific Affairs

It would be presumptuous to imagine that findings about Fiji could justify generalizations about consociation in Third World countries. Nevertheless a few speculations are worth venturing, particularly on the last group of consociational features. It would seem that the final feature (no. 9, external threats) might be looked at in a broader sense and some functional equivalents considered. Elite agreement (no. 5) seems to be an even more vital feature than in developed countries. Parties, autonomous interest-groups, and organizations in general, are all likely to be less institutionalized, and the power of leaders more likely to be exercised on a personal basis. Daalder seems to be unduly pessimistic about the ability of leaders in developing countries to make use of pluralist traditions, as has been done with some success in Fiji. Distinct lines of cleavage among subcultures (no. 6), often racially-based, provide convenient clientèles for leaders, but, just because they are so distinct, make consociational arrangements difficult. Followers can see, or think that they can see, which racial group is making which concessions to which other group. A façade of ambiguity cannot be maintained for long by the co-operating elites; the consequence, as Rabushka and Shepsle have pointed out, is likely to be outbidding and a resultant loss of support from followers (no. 7). Both Ratu Mara and Mr. Koya have had problems on this score. The former, although firmly in control of his party, was faced with Butadroka’s challenge, while the latter had not been outbid from outside the party, but was open to replacement by outbidders inside it who were eager to take over the leadership.

Finally, Fijian experience suggests an adaptation of consociational theory to meet the case of a bi-polar society on the question of the balance of power among subcultures (no. 8). Some of the instability foreseen by Rabushka and Shepsle is prevented by reducing ambiguity, not about the details of which group gets what, but about which group is in ultimate control. This does not eliminate outbidding (as Butadroka’s “revolt” shows), but it helps to reassure one racial group that its basic interests will be taken care of. A bi-polar situation is also hegemonic. At the same time the interests of the other main group are taken into account; inside pre-determined boundaries there is bargaining, and concessions are sometimes made.

There is obviously a limit to the application of consociationalism. The mere existence of bargaining, which may exist even in South Africa or in tightly-controlled Communist states, is not enough to warrant analysis in terms of consociationalism. But there is no reason to be unduly restrictive in applying consociationalism, or to assume,
Consociational Politics in Fiji

for example, that consociationalism is always accompanied by "democracy." The properties of consociationalism and "democracy" should be disentangled.78 The existence of hegemony in Fiji should certainly not be a barrier to attempts to analyse it, and similar societies, in consociational terms.

University of British Columbia, May 1975


CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

JUNE TEUFEL DRYER, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

DOUGLAS H. MENDEL, JR., Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; author of The Politics of Formosan Nationalism.

R. S. MILNE, Professor of Political Science, University of British Columbia; author of Government and Politics in Malaysia.

JANE P. SHAPIRO, Associate Professor of Political Science, Manhattanville College, Purchase, N.Y.; co-editor, Communist Systems in Comparative Perspective.

WILLIAM S. TURLEY, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Southern Illinois University.

JOHN R. WOOD, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of British Columbia; Resident Director, Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, New Delhi, 1973-75.