

Political Reviews

The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 2011

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Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2011

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FIJI

The year 2011 was the first since the December 2006 coup to occur without a major political crisis in Fiji. In every previous year, the regime faced stiff tests that potentially threatened its very survival: public sector strikes in 2007, the rupture with Mahendra Chaudhry's Fiji Labour Party in 2008, a ruling on the unconstitutionality of the government followed by the abrogation of the constitution in 2009, and schisms among the military top command in late 2010. By contrast, 2011 passed without major domestic challenges, although harassment of trade unionists, the Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree 2011, and cuts in pensions encouraged a significant reconfiguration and internationalization of the opposition. Fueled by the silencing of domestic critics, the foreign sympathizers of the Frank Bainimarama-led government became more outspoken but carefully couched their urging of overseas "reengagement" as a sensible strategy for protecting Australia's sphere of influence from Chinese encroachment. By the end of the year, the Fiji interim government had hired Washington DC-based spin-doctoring firm Qorvis to bombard the world's media with positive news stories about Fiji.

The fifth year since the 2006 coup initially commenced, as 2010 had finished, with more signs of

top-level schisms. Two of the most senior officers in the Republic of Fiji Military Forces—Land Forces Commander Brigadier General Pita Driti and Third Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment Commander Roko Tevita Uluilakeba Mara—had been, without official explanation, told to use up outstanding leave in October 2010. In February 2011, they were replaced in their substantive positions, respectively, by Colonel Mosese Tikoitoga and Lieutenant Colonel Jone Logavatu Kalouniwai. Tevita Mara, the youngest son of the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji's former president, had until 2008 been a strong backer of the 2006 coup and a loyal ally of Bainimarama. He was the officer who urged the military's case at Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs at the time of the December 2006 coup, and he later carried out a mini-coup to secure for himself chairmanship of the Lau Provincial Council. In 2010, he had been overheard denouncing the regime while overseas, in transit through South Korea, and the matter was reported back to Bainimarama. Mara and Driti were brought before the Suva Magistrates Court in May 2011 on charges of sedition and incitement to mutiny, but they were released on bail. Coming close on the heels of the November 2010 resignation of Defence Minister Ratu Epeli Ganilau, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's son-in-law, the new dismissals signaled a broader breach with a once-powerful dynasty. Yet the president, Ratu Epeli Naila-

tikau—who like Ganilau is married to one of Ratu Mara’s daughters—remained at his post. Rumors spread of an impending showdown, which even extended to draft presidential decrees dismissing the prime minister, circulated on the feverishly anti-Bainimarama weblogs.

Nailatikau’s predecessor as president, Tui Vuda Ratu Josefa Iloilo, died in February, and was given a full state funeral in recognition of his almost consistent willingness to follow a script written for him by military officers. Traditional presentations (*i-reguregu*) honoring Ratu Iloilo at Vuda were made by both Bainimarama and his senior military officers as well as by their arch-adversary, Tui Cakau Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, whose family is closely tied to that of Ratu Josefa (FijiLive, 15 Feb 2011). This was one of many events, as required by protocol in Fiji society, during which fierce opponents came together in ceremonial contexts, despite the bitterness occasioned by the 2006 coup and its aftermath.

Bainimarama’s indigenous opponents were less vociferous in 2011 than in earlier years, but tensions still festered just beneath the surface. In February and again in March, international human rights watchdog Amnesty International reported that “the human rights situation in Fiji is worsening,” pointing to a new spate of arbitrary detentions and beatings of trade unionists, politicians, and youth activists (Amnesty International 2011). Sam Speight, brother of 2000 coup leader George Speight, was badly beaten for distributing a video denouncing Bainimarama’s government. Other forms of intimidat-

tion were subtler. Economist Wadan Narsey, one of the few coup opponents to continue to publicly denounce the regime, was terminated from his post at the University of the South Pacific after a government threat to withdraw funding to the regional institution (RNZI, 19 Aug 2011). Repression drove protest underground. In August, the clandestine “Viti Revolutionary Forces” was scrawling anti-regime graffiti across the capital and setting fire to remote bus shelters. Later in the year, villagers in Namosi openly protested against the planned Newcrest mining project, but with placards cautiously indicating that the message was “pro-government” but “anti-mining” (PNG Mine Watch 2012).

The Methodist Church had been prohibited from holding its annual meeting in 2009 and 2010, but in 2011 the conference was scheduled to go ahead in August. Military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Neumi Leweni insisted that church leaders take the opportunity to address “anomalies within its hierarchy” (*Fiji Times*, 12 Aug 2011). Despite harassment by soldiers at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks, church leaders refused to comply with demands that the agenda for the conference include the removal of General Secretary Tui-kilakila Waqairatu and President Ame Tugae. As a result, the three-day convention was reduced to a single day and the choir and *sol*i (fund-raising) competition canceled. Land Forces Commander Mosese Tikoitoga said at a press briefing that some ministers were “disrupting the forward movement of the church” while others were “working very hard to bridge this gap” (*Fiji Times*, 24 Aug 2011). At

the scaled-down gathering, Waqairatu and Tugaue were reelected, signaling that Bainimarama's triumph was not yet complete, despite all the carefully choreographed apologies for past resistance he was able to obtain across rural Fiji.

In May, Tevita Mara dramatically escaped from Fiji to Tonga. He claimed—unconvincingly but presumably to protect the identities of those who had assisted—that he had been out fishing in waters off Kadavu but had run into difficulties near the island of Ono-i-Lau, where he had by chance been picked up by a patrolling Tongan naval vessel. He was taken to the Tongan capital, Nuku'alofa, and placed under the protection of King George Tupou V, a distant relative. From Nuku'alofa, Mara denounced the “hateful dictatorship” in Fiji. He said that he had “believed in Bainimarama, in what he was doing” until late 2007, but that Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum was subsequently brought aboard the, until-then, powerful military council and had subverted the original heroic objectives of the coup (*Matangi Tonga*, 27 May 2011; *The Age*, 17 May 2011). The escape sparked a diplomatic spat between Fiji and Tonga over demands for the extradition of Mara, potentially to be heard before the new Tongan Chief Justice Michael Scott, himself ironically a fugitive from the coup-related fallout in the Fiji judiciary. The Mara episode also renewed an ancient Tonga-Fiji dispute over the Minerva Reefs, located close to the maritime border between the two nations. Tonga reconstructed a navigation beacon on the reef, claiming that the earlier beacon had been destroyed by the Fiji navy

(RNZI, 25 May 2011). Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi said in jest that Commodore Bainimarama should be grateful to Tonga for rescuing at sea his senior army officer: “Perhaps that’s what happens when their admiral spends all his time in politics leaving the navy headless” (Malielegaoi 2011). Tuilaepa said it was all a “Togafiti,” a squabble between friends, fully understood only by those few who knew that in Samoan “Togafiti” also means a sneaky trick.

Now possessing a Tongan passport, Mara traveled to Australia, allowed to enter despite travel bans against senior Fiji military officers because—according to Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd—he had been “decommissioned from the military and [had] disassociated himself from the regime” (ABC, 16 June 2011). In a series of speeches broadcast on the Internet, Mara alleged rampant corruption in the coup-spawned government. He claimed that Bainimarama and his attorney general were surreptitiously paying themselves multiple salaries, one for each of their many ministerial portfolios, through an accounting firm owned by Sayed-Khaiyum’s aunt Nur Bano Ali, and that both were taking “kickbacks on their Asian infrastructure deals” (Mara 2011b). Mara also blamed Bainimarama for personally beating pro-democracy activists at the barracks (Mara 2011a), a claim at least partially denied by some of those concerned, who insisted that Mara and Driti themselves had been key perpetrators of human rights violations in the aftermath of the 2006 coup. Mara was also cagey about key parts of his story, such as the composition of the

military council (ABC Pacific Beat, 31 May 2011), generating doubts about the credibility of many of his statements. Bainimarama retorted angrily, calling Mara a “fugitive” and “political opportunist” (FijiLive, 10 June 2011). New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully said he had reports of growing tensions within the regime (FijiLive, 26 May 2011; RNZI, 16 May 2011). From Mara’s home on Lakeba, a letter was written forbidding Bainimarama from ever again setting foot on the island (FBCL, 30 May 2011). Yet, echoing a well-established pattern, the tensions soon blew over, and Bainimarama traveled to the Lau islands to receive another choreographed traditional apology from more pragmatic members of the Maraclan (*Fiji Times*, 15 June 2011; FBCL, 17 June 2011).

The diplomatic stalemate over Fiji continued through 2011. In February, the Pacific Island Forum’s Ministerial Contact Group (MCG) on Fiji met in Vanuatu and “reaffirmed” its concerns about “the respect for democracy, good governance and the rule of law” in Fiji and about the continued extension of the public emergency regulations (MCG 2011). Fiji’s interim Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola invited the Ministerial Contact Group to visit Fiji to observe steps being taken toward democracy. His New Zealand counterpart, McCully, welcomed the invitation as a “constructive and positive sign,” despite rejecting the Fiji government’s insistence on the delay of elections until 2014. Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs Richard Marles insisted that no visit to Fiji was possible unless the Ministerial

Contact Group was allowed to meet freely with political parties, civil society, and church leaders (ABC Pacific Beat, 14 Feb 2011)—something that had been denied to Commonwealth and United Nations visiting missions. Kevin Rudd told TV New Zealand in March that “Bainimarama is the one who must change here” (*Islands Business*, 28 March 2011). The Australian opposition foreign affairs spokesperson, Julie Bishop, took a contrary line, saying that the core issue was to support electoral reform ahead of the scheduled 2014 polls (ABC Pacific Beat, 31 March 2011). McCully too was pragmatic and kept up mobile telephone communication with Foreign Minister Kubuabola, hoping to use full Fiji participation in New Zealand’s rugby world cup as a carrot to entice Bainimarama into accepting early elections (*New Zealand Herald*, 29 March 2011).

The Fiji government’s response was to work instead on cementing ties with the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). In December 2010, Bainimarama took over as MSG chair and, in March 2011, he hosted the organization’s annual summit. In August, Melanesian leaders gathered for Bainimarama’s second “Engaging the Pacific” summit, again scheduled just ahead of the annual meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), from which Fiji remained suspended. Also in attendance were some of Fiji’s small Micronesian neighbors, who are dependent on links to the outside world through Fiji’s Nadi airport. Kiribati’s Aote Tong urged that Fiji’s suspension be lifted. Melanesian leaders called for PIF Secretary-General Tuiloma Neroni Slade to be

replaced (*Islands Business*, 1 Sept 2011). As it happened, the Auckland PIF summit did neither, with leaders instead expressing “their continuing deep concern at the deteriorating human rights situation” (PIF 2011). Both inside and outside the region, attitudes toward Bainimarama varied markedly. Sāmoa’s Tuilaepa regularly abused Bainimarama in a jocular fashion and in November held the first summit of a new Polynesian Leaders Group (*Savali*, 28 Nov 2011), aimed at countering the Fiji government’s Melanesian diplomacy. Some Australian commentators lionized Fiji’s coup leader as the “King of the Pacific” (Davis 2011), while others demonized him as “the incipient Colonel Gaddafi of the Pacific” (Hughes 2011).

Bainimarama’s government also sought to build ties further afield. Embassies were set up in South Africa and Brazil, and diplomatic links were forged or strengthened with Georgia, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Soft loans from Beijing positioned Chinese companies for expansion into infrastructure and mining projects, particularly in manganese and bauxite. The China Railway First Group was awarded contracts for road and bridge building around eastern Viti Levu (*Xinhua News* 2011). Xinfu Aurum Exploration (Fiji) obtained a license to mine bauxite in Nawailevu in Bua Province, with plans for a F\$3.5 million jetty for export direct to China (*Fiji Times*, 6 Nov 2011).

Release by WikiLeaks of a US cable dating back to June 2009 revealed something about Chinese attitudes toward Fiji. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of North

American and Oceanian Affairs Deputy Director Zhou Jian had told the Americans that China valued Fiji as a “useful transition point and for its proximity to important shipping lanes.” Like the resource-rich African nations, Fiji was a “valuable destination for economic engagement but of marginal and possibly declining political utility.” Fiji’s culture, he said, resembled China’s in its focus on “consensus-building” and because both were “not fit” for competitive politics. Countering exaggerated reports about a vast increase in Chinese assistance, Zhou Jian pointed out that the big rise in Chinese assistance dated from before the coup in 2006 and said that “no new projects had been begun since” (US Government 2009).

Another secret US cable exposed by WikiLeaks showed that the United States had at the time of the coup strongly countered Australian pressure to halt recruitment of Fiji soldiers on United Nations peacekeeping missions and had even resisted calling that takeover a “coup” due to the “importance of Fiji to UN peacekeeping operations in Baghdad and elsewhere” (US Government 2006). In May 2011, Rudd announced a policy switch, saying that Australia would no longer object to new Fiji troops being deployed to Baghdad (*ABC Pacific Beat*, 11 May 2011). Behind the scenes, Australian travel sanctions were gradually being eased and contacts with the ministries restored, signaling a steady drift toward pragmatism. In November, Rudd announced a doubling of bilateral aid to Fiji, from A\$18 million to A\$36 million in 2013–14 (Rudd 2011). Oddly,

these concessions were barely noticed by those urging an accommodation with Bainimarama. Australian think tanks had called for “re-engagement” on the grounds that a policy switch would deliver significant concessions, but there was no sign of any reciprocal movement from the Fiji interim government during 2011. The think tanks focused on bilateral Australia-Fiji relations, as if this were the key driver of events, disregarding the domestic dynamics within Fiji.

At the Auckland PIF meeting, the Lowy Institute released an opinion poll conducted within Fiji by market research firm Tebbutt Research and funded by Fiji-born businessman Mark Johnson (Hayward-Jones 2011). This was based on interviews with 1,032 adults in urban areas of Fiji’s largest island, Viti Levu, in August 2011. It found that Bainimarama had a 66 percent approval rating and was used to reinforce pressure both from the Lowy Institute and the ANZ Bank for a policy switch toward Fiji. The poll was much criticized by civil society activists within Fiji, who pointed to the prevailing climate of fear and intimidation and asked how Tebbutt had gained permission to carry out its poll (ABC Pacific Beat, 7 Sept 2011). Former *Fiji Times* editor Russell Hunter had been responsible for commissioning occasional opinion polls from Tebbutt Research until he was deported by Bainimarama in 2008. He said that, “When the Tebbutt-Times poll was still operating, Caz [Tebbutt] several times declined to conduct a poll on contentious issues, fearing that the powers that be would shoot the messenger” (Lal and Hunter 2011). Standard practice for polling

organizations is to initially conduct pilot surveys, so Tebbutt would have known the likely findings before carrying out the poll.

Others criticized the poll on the grounds that the sample was too small and pointed to the urban bias, claiming that opposition to Bainimarama would have been stronger in rural Fiji (Narsey 2011). Yet, internationally, approval ratings surveys are regularly conducted with similarly small samples, and there was no good reason to think that the opposition would be weaker in urban Fiji. There were stronger reasons for questioning the Tebbutt methodology. A *Fiji Times*–Tebbutt survey conducted in February 2009 had asked respondents the open-ended question as to whom they preferred as prime minister: 31 percent had favored deposed Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, and 27 percent Bainimarama (see Fraenkel 2010). The 2011 poll asked instead a highly loaded question: “How good a job do you personally think Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama is doing as Prime Minister?” Not only was the full military title used, but the more normal polling formulation would have been to ask “how good or bad” a job Bainimarama was doing. That the survey designers were possibly aware of this unbalanced phrasing was suggested by another question, which did use the positive and negative options: “Do you think Fiji is moving in the right or wrong direction?” To this question, 65 percent of respondents responded “the right direction,” but the exact meaning of “right” or “wrong” in this context was highly uncertain. Even coup critics might reasonably hope that Fiji was moving in the right direction. The

Tebbutt poll was used brazenly by the Fiji government to blow its trumpet throughout the rest of 2011, with the Ministry of Information's Sharon Smith-Johns crowing that Bainimarama was "almost three times more popular with the people of Fiji than the Prime Minister Gillard is with the people of Australia" (Fiji Government 2011).

More broadly, approval ratings may be reasonably indicative of shifts in popular sentiment in the mass industrial democracies, but they are of questionable value in a country like Fiji, particularly in a climate of severe censorship and intimidation. Indigenous anger against government had visibly subsided by 2011, but acquiescence remained limited. Several prominent chiefs had publicly made their peace with Bainimarama, but Rewa's Ro Teimumu Kepa, among others, still publicly opposed the government, and the Methodist Church had rejected strong incentives to buckle. With five years having passed since the military takeover, there was less focus on the rights or wrongs of the coup but more concern with present difficulties and options for the future. Fiji Indian support for the government remained strong. Veteran National Federation Party leader and Australian émigré Karam Ramrakha expressed relief that, unlike in the aftermath of the 1987 and 2000 coups, "for once no one is cursing the Indo-Fijians for Fiji's problems" (Ramrakha 2011). The real test would be a general election, but this was to be delayed until 2014, and there was little confidence within Fiji that those polls, if they happened at all, would be free and fair.

Gross domestic product grew by

2 percent in 2011, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), after posting an increase of only 0.3 percent in 2010 and shrinking by 1.3 percent in 2009 (IMF 2012). Tourism was the mainstay of the recovery. After a 7.4 percent contraction in visitor arrivals in 2009, 16.6 percent growth was witnessed in 2010 and strong growth continued in 2011. Arrivals from Australia during 2011 were over three times the level of a decade earlier. Previously, the Asian Development Bank had argued that earnings were failing to keep pace with raw visitor numbers, but by 2011 earnings too were clearly on the increase (ADB 2011). Performance in other sectors was less impressive, and investment remained stagnant while the banks were swimming in cash. The sugar industry was in steep decline. In 2009 and 2010, there were signs that the government would abandon efforts to save the troubled industry, which was delisted on the Suva stock exchange in 2010. However, in January 2011, new Fiji Sugar Corporation Chairman Abdul Khan said that the Rarawai Mill (the weakest of Fiji's four mills) was in "too strategic a position to be closed down" (*Fiji Times*, 27 Jan 2011). The British-based company Tate & Lyle, the major purchaser of Fiji sugar, promised some assistance. The best that could be hoped for, said Khan, was a "cash-neutral" position (ABC Pacific Beat, 18 April 2011). Bainimarama blamed the troubles on the politicization of the industry (*Fiji Sun*, 22 February 2011). The Fiji Labour Party's Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi responded that huge falls in productivity had occurred during 2008–2010, during a "time when there was 'no

politics” (Vayeshnoi 2011). In March, after claiming that the government was “fooling the farmers by not telling them the real situation of the mills,” National Farmers Union President Gaffar Ahmed was allegedly beaten during a visit by Bainimarama to the Ba Sugar Mill (Coup Four Point Five, 7 March 2011). In June, military officers allegedly assaulted Mohamed Khalil, president of the Ba branch of the Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union (RNZI 28 June 2011; ABC Pacific Beat, 4 Aug 2011).

A major hurdle for Bainimarama’s government was a F\$300 (US\$150) million bond due for repayment in September 2011, anticipated by some economists as likely to generate a financial crisis sufficient to sink the regime. Negotiations for a standby loan from the International Monetary Fund to cover that debt repayment were abandoned in 2010. The 2011 budget speech indicated instead an intention to raise the necessary finance on the private money markets. This fiscal optimism was to prove well founded. In March, the ANZ Bank brokered a new loan, obtaining F\$500 million mainly from European, American, and Asian investors at a 9 percent interest rate. Ratings agency Standard & Poor’s gave the bond a B-grade, reflecting a view that “the country’s persistent fiscal and current account deficits leave it vulnerable to default” (S&P 2011). By late 2010, government debt had reached 57.7 percent of gross domestic product, or 91.2 percent if government guaranteed debt is included, according to Asian Development Bank data (ADB 2011).

The IMF standby loan, reportedly available at a much lower interest rate,

had been offered with strings attached. Despite rejecting IMF assistance, Fiji’s government did embrace some of the supranational organization’s proposals for civil service and land reform. Reforms to the Fiji National Provident Fund, which holds 80 percent of long-term government bonds and 48 percent of treasury bills, had been urged. In May, the provident fund reduced its pension rate from 15 percent to 9 percent, generating outcry from senior citizens. A case brought before the courts on the issue by pensioner David Burness, with the assistance of former Fiji Human Rights Commissioner Shaista Shameem, was dismissed by the court. It was another sign of how subservient the courts had become, although Attorney General Sayed-Khaiyum vigorously protested that the judiciary was independent and not subject to government interference. One of the judges who had delivered the verdict declaring the Bainimarama government unconstitutional in April 2009, Randall Powell, said in August 2011 that “the Fiji military regime’s idea of an independent judiciary is one that does the government’s bidding.” Constant interference was unnecessary, he continued, because the judges appointed “would know that if they start pursuing an independent line there can be consequences” (ABC Pacific Beat, 18 Aug 2011).

Another IMF proposal had been for land reform. In February, a Land Use Bank was established to administer deposits of native and crown land (*Fiji Times*, 17 Feb 2011). The i-Taukei Land Trust Board (formerly the Native Land Trust Board)—which administers the renting of communally owned land—was directed to change

its formula for distribution of lease money and lifted rents to 10 percent of unimproved capital value (FijiLive, 4 Feb, 19 Jan 2011). A majority of rent income was formerly distributed to Fiji's customary chiefs, with the residual going to ordinary members of the *mataqali* (clan). Under the new regulations, rent was to be distributed equally among *mataqali* members. The change removed key income sources for the chiefs, particularly in the western part of Viti Levu, where traditional leaders obtain large rents from agriculture and tourism. Ironically, one impact of the change was to double the number of new indigenous Fijians signing up on the Vola ni Kawa Bula (Register of Native Births), a tool of racial coding much despised by sympathizers of the Bainimarama government (FijiLive, 27 July 2011).

The government was less keen to accept IMF proposals in other areas. A blizzard of tax regulations alienated even sympathizers within the private sector, and new rules—immune from judicial review—were regularly devised to retrospectively remedy belatedly apparent defects in earlier decrees. The Prices and Incomes Board, under Dr Mahendra Reddy, continued to regulate markets, supposedly in the interests of the less well off. The government introduced an across-the-board 10 percent minimum wage increase in May, undermining the long-standing efforts of Wages Council Chairman Father Kevin Barr to set distinct minimum wage levels for nine separate industries. Father Barr threatened to resign in February, criticizing the government for regularly caving in to employers (RNZI, 9 Feb 2011). He claimed that, despite

measures to alleviate hardship for the poor, poverty had been increasing in Fiji, largely because the government had followed the advice of international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Barr 2011). Signs that poverty was indeed worsening around the country included reports of an increase in begging in Suva (ABC Pacific Beat, 27 April 2011) and of rising incidences of the theft of marine beacons, road signs, manhole covers, and bridge railings by scrap metal collectors (ABC Pacific Beat, 11 May 2011; FBCL, June 24 2011; *Fiji Sun*, 25 June 2011). Meat consumption was becoming less affordable. In August, the Suva and Nadi branches of Kentucky Fried Chicken announced their closure due to “rising costs and deteriorating sales” (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2011).

During the first half of 2011, several prominent trade unionists associated with the Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC) were harassed and beaten by military officers. National Secretary Felix Anthony was taken into custody in February and President Daniel Urai—together with FTUC staffer Dinesh Gounder—was arrested in August (ABC Pacific Beat, 4 Aug 2011). In response, the Australian and New Zealand unions threatened to halt in-bound flights to Fiji but desisted after concerns about the legality of such action. General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation Sharan Burrow said the unions would nevertheless escalate action against the Fiji regime (RNZI, 8 Aug 2011).

Efforts to curtail the activities of trade unions also occurred in

the legislative sphere. The Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree 2011 was introduced in July. It applied to eleven designated corporations in the banking, telecommunications, civil aviation, and public utility industries. Existing collective agreements were voided, and trade unions were required to reregister. Strike action was curtailed, and the jurisdiction of the wages councils was removed. Union leaders were required to be employees of the industries they represented, effectively ruling out most of the existing professional trade union leadership. The likely fate of those trade unionists who were state employees was vividly illustrated by the fate of Tevita Koroi, president of the Fiji Teachers Association. An investigation by the International Labour Office (ILO) found that, after speaking out against the interim government, Mr Koroi was suspended as a school principal in December 2008 and terminated in April 2009. The ILO declared this a “clear violation of his right to exercise his legitimate duties as a trade union leader” and called for his reinstatement (ILO 2011). An ILO delegation to Fiji in August was tasked with investigating broader allegations of violations of trade union freedom of association. On the very weekend that the delegation arrived, police broke up an FTUC meeting in Nadi on the grounds that the required and granted police permit for the meeting had been suddenly revoked.

Other legislation also weakened the position of the trade unions. The Employment Relations Amendment Decree of 2011 removed protections for 15,000 civil servants. In August, an amendment to the Civil Service Act

abolished the automatic deduction of union dues for public employees, a reform previously introduced in the sugar industry to weaken the position of the National Farmers Union. Bainimarama and Sayed-Khaiyum claimed that union leaders were politically motivated and corrupt, pointing to large directors’ fees allegedly taken by Mr Anthony and Mr Urai as directors of the Fiji National Provident Fund during 2007–2009 (FijiLive, July 21 2011; FBCL, 22 July 2011). In September, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia called for the rescinding of the Essential National Industries Decree and “a return to dialogue with trades unions and employers, an end to assaults on and harassment of trade unionists, and the immediate restoration of basic civil liberties” (Somavia 2011).

Throughout 2011 there were few major speeches by Bainimarama and no major interviews. With domestic resistance mostly crushed, there perhaps seemed less urgent need to justify government policy, and the commodore’s off-the-cuff remarks in the past had generated major difficulties for spin-doctors at the Ministry of Information. The danger of the government edging toward a personalist dictatorship was revealed by the outcome of a Fiji TV phone-in popularity contest at the end of 2011. Apparently, officials got wind of the fact that Bainimarama was unlikely to win the contest and arranged a barrage of last-minute phone calls so as to lift the prime minister’s rating above that of Consumer Council Chair Premila Kumar (Coup Four Point Five, 14 Jan 2012; Field 2012). By mistake, Fiji TV closed the poll on 30 December rather than

31 December, so Premila Kumar was announced the winner. Bainimarama's backers across the government cried foul. The Commerce Commission's Mahendra Reddy launched an investigation, querying the early closure of the poll (Reddy 2012). Fiji TV apologized and quickly reversed the result, with Bainimarama proclaimed the victor. Such reactions, even to the outcome of a minor telephone survey, left little confidence that a future nationwide election would be free or fair.

The year 2011 was a relatively quiet one in Fiji, though it was not without incident. Much of the focus was on 2012, when talks were due to commence toward a new constitution, paving the way for elections in September 2014. The Public Emergency Regulations were to be removed, but when this was done in January 2012, accompanied by a global press blitz by Qorvis, new public order legislation was immediately slapped into place that effectively entailed little change from the earlier arrangements. That public relations exercise therefore ultimately backfired, only reinforcing the perception that the Bainimarama government's promises were in bad faith. In fact, that Janus-faced character of the new order reflected conflicting pressures, emanating from opportunists connected with Sayed-Khaiyum (who were reluctant to see the emergency regulations lifted) and from a more liberal grouping within the military senior command (which resented the ever-increasing influence of the attorney-general). Little more was said publicly about Commodore Bainimarama's professed interest in a presidential system, expressed in April to visiting Indonesian election officials

(*Fiji Times*, 9 April 2011). For several years, Bainimarama had regularly indicated that opponents would not be allowed to contest future elections, but speaking on New Zealand television in June, Sayed-Khaiyum insisted that "absolutely anybody" would be allowed to stand, except those in jail (FijiLive, 26 June 2011). In preparation for those exceptions, both Qarase and Chaudhry appeared before the courts during 2011, charged with corruption (FijiVillage, 13 Sept 2011). Thus 2011 was a year when any lingering hopes for a restoration of the old order—with Qarase and Chaudhry as key players—steadily vanished, but it was also a year of anxiety about the future and disquiet about the present.

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NEW CALEDONIA

Political tensions in early 2011 came close to unraveling the “collegial” institutions put in place by the Noumea Accord of 1998, as the governing cabinet fell four times, until a new alliance emerged between leading loyalist and pro-independence parties. When local governance had seemed to stabilize, tragic intercom-