

RSL represents one kind of action, and it is to the authors' great credit that they present it as just that: action on behalf of (almost) all concerned to achieve the overlapping aim of developing the Upper Ramu. That this aim means so many different things to the actors is beautifully demonstrated. The sense one is left with—of complex contradictions not only between the position of RSL and its workers and dependents, but also within each party—demonstrates the positive complexity and value of the text. This is nowhere more detailed or skillfully presented than in the way the authors chart Papua New Guineans' career trajectories at RSL. It becomes clear that the opposition between "kinship and ples" and the demands of a rationalized working life are not the only factors. Many others—including desire for distinctiveness, the attractions of power and hierarchy, timeless and essentialized notions of what PNG traditional behavior is, notions of reciprocity—contribute to difficulties workers face in balancing career and identity, and thus falling in fully with the project of RSL. Local landowners, out-growers (semi-independent cane farmers), and expatriate managers face similar contradictory desires and perceptions of the enterprise. The exemplary level of detail, which includes solid survey data and archival research, is vital for those who wish to understand this group of people's various aims and expectations, and thus their responses, to "development."

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*British Documents on the End of Empire*. Series B, Volume 10: *Fiji*, edited by Brij V Lal. Published for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the University of London. London: The Stationery Office, 2006. ISBN 978-011-290589-9; cii + 547 pages, map, notes, biographical notes, bibliography, index. £120.00.

This volume presents formerly secret and confidential dispatches, reports, and correspondence produced by British colonial officials in London and Suva as they prepared Fiji for its independence. Editor Brij V Lal's task was to examine a vast range of documents, select a limited number for publication, and write an introductory review. The one hundred eighty-one items included cover the period from 1955 to 1970, when independence was granted. In his introduction, Lal reviews issues, actions, and trends in the period, against the backdrop of Fiji's development as a colonial society. He describes the process of dialogue and debate between London and Fiji and within the London office itself, the meetings between London officials and the political leaders of Fiji, and the preparations for the two constitutional conferences in London in 1965 and 1970.

The officials faced the daunting challenge of dealing with conflicts and fears in Fiji arising from the profound ethnic divide that their predecessors had created. Lengthy dispatches to London by various governors reported on the political situation, the leading personalities and their aspirations and difficulties, and the contentious issues. The documents produced in London illuminate the political pres-

tures, domestic and international, that influenced the directives given to the governors, and the decision making for ending colonial rule.

The documents reveal the great extent to which official assessments and decisions were influenced by the demands of the indigenous Fijian chiefly establishment. The authority of that elite, strengthened by administrative changes in the 1940s, had encouraged their sense of entitlement to political privilege. The high chiefs, led by Ratu Mara (later Fiji's first prime minister), and strongly supported by the Fijian people, insisted that any change must have their approval and secure the Fijians and their lands against the possibility of Indian domination.

The London officials initially hoped to replace the communal system of political representation in which electorates and seats were ethnically defined, by a common franchise without reservation of seats, a reform that Indian leaders had long advocated and which the United Nations was demanding. However the Fijian leaders were initially opposed even to the idea of self-government, as were their old allies, the local Europeans, who as a tiny minority had long feared the Indians' economic and demographic advance.

The officials soon abandoned their plan for a common franchise, fearing that to attempt such a radical change would alienate the Fijians and risk a violent ethnic conflict that would be difficult to control given the Fijian predominance in the police and army. They became resigned to working toward self-government within a system of ethnic group representation

favoring the Fijians. The outcome of the first constitutional conference in 1965 affirmed this approach, much to the anger of the Indian leaders.

The colonial governor, who had recently served in Sarawak, encouraged Ratu Mara to form a multiethnic political party modeled on the Alliance Party in Malaya. Mara's Alliance Party, based mainly on the Fijian Association, insisted on preservation of the communal political system. Yet it achieved substantial multiethnic support, whereas the Federation Party (later National Federation Party), which condemned the communal system, remained an almost entirely Indian organization. The documents illuminate the emergence of Ratu Mara as the dominant political figure, a man of formidable intelligence and personality who sometimes alarmed the British officials by his angry moods when thwarted. His relationship to the fluctuating force of Fijian nationalist sentiment remained ambivalent. At times he aligned with it, at other times was under threat from it, and occasionally exploited it to strengthen his influence with the British as the indispensable leader who could restrain it.

The governor allowed the Alliance Party to take the reins of government on many matters following its victory in the 1966 election. This provoked the Federation Party to call for a new constitutional conference and to boycott the Legislative Council. The party's regaining of all Indian communal seats in by-elections in 1968 provoked Fijian protests, which their leaders subdued just as interethnic violence was breaking out. The documents highlight how very difficult it was for the colonial officials to encour-

age conciliatory dialogue among the local political leaders before this crisis, and how compromise was ultimately achieved through events and political initiatives in Fiji that emerged independently of the officials but much to their relief.

The crisis of 1968 encouraged the Federation Party leaders to moderate their stance for a common franchise, and provoked the Fijian leaders to seek independence with Fijian dominance entrenched. Toward the end of 1969, however, understandings were reached through confidential talks in Suva in which the Fijian leaders softened their demand. These candid and cordial discussions, conducted over several months, led to a united request to Britain for independence on terms that preserved ethnic political representation and gave the Fijian Great Council of Chiefs a limited veto power in an upper house of Fiji's Parliament. The rapprochement achieved after a phase of ethnic tension was euphorically celebrated. Sadly, only five years after Independence the accord was broken, as the rise of Fijian nationalism weakened Mara's resolve to address the needs of Indians.

It has often been suggested that Fiji's political traumas might have been avoided by wiser British handling of decolonization. The archival record does not support this view. A much earlier attempt to abandon the policy of ethnic separation might have encouraged integration. But that is by no means certain, and there was hardly a prospect for such a change near the end of British rule. The Fijian opposition to the idea of a common franchise was enormous, and Ratu Mara and his fellow paramount chiefs,

whom the British were convinced they had to placate, had difficulty persuading their people simply to accept the Alliance Party. Ironically, the Indian leaders' hopes for continuing United Nations support for their common franchise demand were dashed by Ratu Mara's remarkable success, largely through secret negotiations, in persuading the Government of India, initially Britain's strongest critic on Fiji, to endorse his cautious approach to change.

As another scholar who has closely studied the Fiji archives in London, I can say that Lal's selection of documents is a reliable sourcebook on the official work of decolonization, and that his introduction to this volume is a cogent account of the complexities and difficulties of that process. In addition to the texts on constitutional reform and politics, there are documents on racial balance in the civil service; the "four-power" talks with American, New Zealand, and Australian officials; industrial associations; the emerging problem of Indian emigration; and trade relations with the European Economic Community. The absence of extracts from the transcript of the Suva talks is disappointing, for it is arguably the most significant single text in Fiji's decolonization history. It is not strictly a part of the official record, but hopefully it will eventually be made readily accessible to researchers.

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