

Bonapartism in the South Pacific: The Bainimarama Government in Fiji



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Introduction¹

Since independence in 1970, governments in Fiji have been *most often* described around two major themes. The first emphasises the race and/or ethnicity of the country's governments, and whether they were led by Taukei or Indo-Fijians — prime ministers Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara, Timoci Bavadra, Sitiveni Rabuka, Laisenia Qarase, Josaia Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, or Mahendra Chaudhry. Occasionally, class is injected into this description, usually in the Weberian form of race *and* class, ethnicity *and* class. The second theme has characterised governments according to whether they held power as the result of elections or as the consequence of parliamentary takeovers and coups.² When the second means of acquiring and holding power has provided the basis of authority, governments have been continually castigated, urged to 'return Fiji to democracy'. While there have been accounts which do not follow these predominant themes, including from academics and others located within dependency thinking (Ratuva 2013; Sutherland 1992), their influence has been limited in the face of the continuing focus upon the identities of race/ethnicity and elections as the basis for government legitimacy.

This Discussion Paper argues instead that the current government constitutes a particular, different and distinct form of class representation. While all governments in capitalist societies represent both capital and labour, the Bainimarama Government does so in a specific manner. During the period from 2006 until the 2014 election, the main existing forms of political representation were overturned and marginalised. The moves against previous political parties and other institutions,

including the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and trade unions, were especially prominent. The principal task of the government both before and since the election has been how to represent all classes and strata when the main earlier forms of representation are no longer capable of doing so. That is, mediation at the political level has taken on a particular hue.

Additionally, and what gives the government its most distinct characteristic, it is required to mediate *on behalf of capital* when its most important members *are not of any particular firms or capitalists*. That is, the government is required to mediate politically *within* the capitalist class without being *of capital*. In order to strengthen the capacity to mediate *on behalf of capital*, success in representing labour, including retaining popularity, will be critical. As this Discussion Paper shows, this form of mediation at the political level makes the recently elected government distinct from previous Fiji governments, which tied political power to economic power in very obvious ways.

Firstly, this paper explains the particular form of mediation that has arisen in Fiji — Bonapartism — including by reference to its origins in nineteenth-century France. Secondly, the representation of capital, especially local capital, in previous Fiji governments is outlined, so that the differences with the Bainimarama Government can be shown and the current distinct form of political mediation in the political sphere understood. Finally, it is explained how successfully representing labour will not only be critical for the maintenance of electoral democracy but also in strengthening the government's capacity to mediate politically, representing capitalism and some capitalists over others.



Governing as Mediation

There remains considerable confusion over whom and what the recently elected Bainimarama-led government represents. Even before FijiFirst won the election, the confusion continued with the focus on the two 'old' themes noted above. Thus the emphasis on the fact that Bainimarama, as a Taukei naval officer and head of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, seized power in 2006 from a government also led by an indigenous Fijian — Qarase. This preoccupation continued after Bainimarama resigned from his military post, and as head of FijiFirst he campaigned for an end to the politics of race and/or ethnicity. The Bainimarama Government persisted with this theme after taking office,³ which has left commentators still floundering as they try to identify whom and what it represents in terms of race/ethnicity and democracy. In the uncertainty, commentary has returned to the earlier fascinations, including assessing electoral 'ethnic loyalties' (Fraenkel 2015a) and democratic 'fragility' (Lal 2014). There has been little progress in understanding the current government's politics.

When FijiFirst comfortably won the September 2014 election, the 'return to democracy' theme became persistent. With international and domestic observers pronouncing the elections as 'free and fair', this assessment outweighed objections and more cautious evaluations (Madraiwiwi 2015). Overall, there is a striking similarity in the current response to that which followed the 1999 elections won by the Chaudhry-led Peoples Coalition, dominated by the Fiji Labour Party (MacWilliam 2001; cf. Firth 2001:7).

A major reason for the intellectual disarray is that while Fiji is readily described as a capitalist economy (Lal 2006:3; Norton 1977, 1990:1), there has been considerable reluctance to couple capitalism with a process of accumulation, and the existence of the classes that express this process. For most analysts, Fiji is a country where capitalism reigns but without capitalists or a class of labour; instead, what divisions exist are of races, ethnicities and/or communities. Even those who introduce class do so in a Weberian manner, thus race and class, class and ethnicity are treated as if class is one of a number of comparable descriptors rather than,

as with a Marxist materialist account, the central determining condition of all societies beyond the most primitive (Marx and Engels 1998:4).

By way of illustration, consider the following. Writing soon after independence, Robert Norton (1977) employed an admittedly 'erratic use of the terms "race" and "ethnic"' while favouring use of the latter (Norton 1990:xiii). He concluded:

Cultural, social, and economic differences between the major populations of Fiji are perhaps greater than in any comparable society. Special features of colonial rule and the capitalist economy encouraged separation and preservation of distinct traditions. (Norton 1990:1)

Instead, for this paper, it is useful to emphasise the importance of governing as a form of mediation, which takes distinct, distinguishable forms of the connections between economic and political power in capitalist countries. One description, provided by Karl Marx, applicable to the particular circumstances which have arisen in Fiji, was constructed to deal with mid-nineteenth-century France. There, Louis Bonaparte first came to power through an election, but when blocked by parliament in 1851, staged a coup. From first president of the Second French Republic, he became the emperor of the Second French Empire, Napoleon III. Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* is probably best known for its description of the French peasantry as a 'sack of potatoes', and how this characterisation relates to the larger questions of class and, therefore, class consciousness (reprinted in Fernbach 1973). For Marx, Bonaparte represented the most numerous class of French society — the smallholding peasants. Again, in the well-known formulation, Bonaparte represented the peasants, who were a class 'in itself' but not 'for itself'. That is, being unaware or conscious of itself as a class, the peasantry was unorganised and incapable of arranging its own representation in the state and against the other classes of French society, including the ascending bourgeoisie.

However, as well as representing the peasantry, the unelected Bonaparte also represented all the other classes and strata, 'great landowners, financial bourgeoisie, industrial bourgeoisie, petty

bourgeoisie (of various gradations), industrial proletariat, (and) lumpenproletariat' (Fernbach 1973:11). Bonapartism appeared to be an instance where the class 'struggle seems to have reached the compromise that all classes fall on their knees, equally mute and impotent, before the rifle butt' (ibid.:15). However, as much as a military coup rather than an election was the means by which Bonaparte came to power, his subsequent rule depended upon his ability to *mediate relations between* these various classes and strata at a moment when France was undergoing the transition to industrial capitalism. Or, as Michael Cowen concluded, summarising the argument presented by Joe Foweraker (1982) regarding Brazil, 'mediation is not about political intervention in the economy but about political intervention in the political sphere: this being the case, political action, of whatever source, cannot be ascribed from and to the economic state of the actors in question' (Cowen 1986:360). That is, whether a government comes to power as the result of a military coup or an election is not the critical issue here. As in the case of nineteenth-century France, and now in early twenty-first-century Fiji, the most important characteristic of a government — whether headed by Bonaparte or Bainimarama — is that its head and leading members did not belong to the holders of economic power. Put crudely in terms of personalities, Fiji's prime minister is an ex-soldier with continuing close ties to his military base, not a businessman as were Ratu Mara and Qarase.

Political Representation and Economic Power — Representing Capital

From the 1960s until 2006

For each previously elected Fijian government that has remained in power for any length of time, there have been close connections between the holding of economic and political power. The first post-independence government, headed by Ratu Mara, joined the representation of international firms and local European commercial concerns, with Indo-Fijian and indigenous businesses. The last were dominated by chiefly landowning interests, for whom maintaining the Taukei dominance of the colonial property settlement over land was critical financially as well as politically/

ideologically. That is, indigenous, primarily rentier capital secured its economic power through highly personalised ties of representation to members of the class occupying key state institutions, including parliament, local government, and the GCC. For the most important indigenous commercial figures, there was little distance between their political and economic positions.

In 1966, prior to independence, the political bloc, dominated by Taukei chiefs, with local European and other 'minority' support, formed the appropriately named Alliance Party. A major objective of the bloc was to thwart the growing commercial aspirations of Indo-Fijian capital, which had gained especially important access to finance with the 1962 entry of the Gujarat India-based Bank of Baroda. Electoral, parliamentary and administrative politics were dominated until 1987 by the clash between the Alliance Party and the primarily Indo-Fijian National Federation Party and the Fiji Labour Party. The last two contested representing Indo-Fijian capital, cane growers, urban workers and other strata, including small traders.

While this clash could appear as a continuing one of race and/or ethnic competition for political power, beneath the surface two critical changes were occurring in the nature of local capital. As previously important international trading and plantation firms, particularly Australia-based Burns, Philp and Carpenters, were withdrawing from the country, space was being opened for other local bourgeois and would-be bourgeois. While major Indo-Fijian firms began to invest overseas, and the older Taukei chiefs made limited commercial advance, a new generation of indigenous businessmen and women sought political power to further their ambitions. As much as these aspirant commercial figures moved into new fields of accumulation, they worked to maintain the direct ties between political and economic power used by their predecessors.

By 1987, the military coup headed by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, which overthrew the government formed after the electoral victory of the Fiji Labour Party and its recent ally the National Federation Party, provided the opportunity for major changes in the process of indigenous

accumulation. First appearing garbed in a racial/ethnic form in the name of indigenous fears and hopes, the takeover was subsequently changed into party representation (Ratuva 2013). The Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) and then the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) were organised to provide the means for parliamentary and government control.

From 1987 until the 2006 deposition of the Laisenia Qarase government by another military coup, the links between political power and economic power so important to the changes were clearly visible (Ratuva 2013). Indigenous capitalists who accumulated primarily through plundering state assets and prising open ownership of activities constructed by international and other local firms became the pre-eminent local capitalists, with their members prominent in parliament, government, and many administration positions. Political power was coupled with state power to extend economic power. The hold over key financial institutions, including the National Bank of Fiji and the Fiji Development Bank, was used to fuel indigenous accumulation, including by Rotumans (Grynberg et al. 2002).

The most obvious and important initial commercial form Taukei ambitions took during the period from the early 1980s until the mid-2000s was Fijian Holdings Limited (FHL). Established to extend the operations of the provincial councils, FHL was at first solely owned through equity subscriptions from these bodies, the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB), and the Fijian Affairs Board (FAB). After the 1987 military coup, the Rabuka-led government advanced a Fiji \$20 million loan ostensibly to provide finance and boost the position of the councils, where chiefs and their allies held power.

However, over the following years, the firm was effectively privatised. Shares were split into two categories — those held by councils, the NLTB, and the FAB (B-class shares); and a second, distinct type of share, owned by private equity firms associated with Taukei individuals and families (A-class shares). The former category's shareholders became non-voting, recipients of dividends only, and in some years received a lower rate than A-class shares. The private equity firm

shares not only became the majority holdings, they also formed the basis of voting rights in FHL.

Significantly, the private share ownership was often funded by loans, particularly from the Fiji Development Bank. One bank official, Laisenia Qarase, became the most important figure in several of the firms that acquired substantial equity and voting rights in FHL. He was also a financial adviser to the FAB and an adviser to the GCC. FHL became one of Fiji's largest firms through a combination of takeovers of existing operations, joint ventures especially with international firms, and obtaining government contracts.

In 2000, the government, headed by interim prime minister Qarase, was installed with military support after the overthrow of the elected Chaudhry-led Peoples Coalition government. The Qarase government changed the interest-free loan into a grant. While the change improved the equity stake of the provincial councils, the FAB, and the NLTB, it did not change the distinction between voting (A class) and non-voting (B class) shares. FHL became an even more powerful arm of what was now a very prominent 'buccaneering bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engels 1998), among whose members were people who tied their economic power directly to political positions at the apex of state power.

Military rule and breaking ties

Upon coming to power in 2006, the military regime broke the direct ties between the economic and political power of the Taukei business interests that had relied so heavily on the political power exercised by the Rabuka and Qarase governments. This was done in part by overthrowing the Qarase-led government and moving against many of its appointees who held public office. Most importantly for its political strength, military officers, including Bainimarama, also held many of the most important positions in the administration. The Bainimarama Government also drove changes in commercial firms' managements, including FHL. Qarase's closest commercial ally, board secretary and CEO Sitiveni Weleilakeba, was removed from that firm. The new regime's favourites, including military personnel, were installed on the FHL board, and the firm subsequently set on a different

managerial and commercial path. During the military regime, the ties between FHL and Indo-Fijian capital were strengthened, including through a majority shareholding of a prominent trading firm, RB Patel. FHL now has operations in other countries, including Papua New Guinea.

Before the 2014 election, in a move that emphasised its distance from any particular firm, the regime changed the terms of the Fiji \$20 million grant to FHL back into a loan, with specific commercial criteria designed to accelerate repayment to the government. Dividends to both classes of shares were equalised, increasing the rate at which the government's loan for B-class shares could be repaid.

Significantly for this account, and the forms that industrialisation of agriculture might later take under the Bainimarama Government, the flagship Taukei firm has consistently avoided investing in agriculture, although this may be about to change (Panapasa 11/7/2015). In this way, Taukei commerce avoided a clash with the predominant Taukei smallholders in the countryside over the forms production in agriculture took.

The connections between economic power and political power, so important in the initial post-independence governments when landowning, rent-collecting chiefs were present in most governing institutions, were also broken by important changes in the military. Senior officers in the military were increasingly career soldiers, with reduced ties to the higher echelons of the landed aristocracy. This began to be obvious in the 1980s when the 'commoner' Rabuka rose to the top of the military and then became prime minister (Sharpham 2000:80–81). Rabuka subsequently used his political position to become a minor businessman, emphasising how personal accumulation followed and did not precede the gaining of state power for these indigenous buccaneering capitalists.

Between 2006 and 2014 the military regime was headed by officers who largely did not hold substantial economic power and who were increasingly distant as a professionalised stratum from the chiefs who initially dominated the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (cf. Baledrokadroka 2015). While the latter's position in the senior ranks of the military forces, in other state

positions, the legislature, the administration, and other representative organs including the GCC, previously joined political with economic power, since 2006 there has been a major change. (Whether this change will be permanent is another matter altogether.) The military regime attacked and marginalised the political institutions which were critical for the 'old regime' (the GCC, the SVT/SDL/Social Democratic Liberal Party lineage, and those constructed under the 1997 constitution) as well as the party and trade union structures of organised labour. At the 2014 election, no less than 10 former military officers won seats, and nearly all of these were subsequently appointed ministers in the FijiFirst government. This break between economic and political power, epitomised by Taukei ex-military officers with few substantial commercial interests of their own, became critical for the form of mediation represented by the Bainimarama Government.

Indo-Fijian capital

With the 1999 election defeat of the National Federation Party and its near disappearance from representative politics, Indo-Fijian capital's political marginalisation, which had begun with the 1987 coup, was extended. The moves to invest overseas that had started in the 1980s and subsequently accelerated were indicative of the further loss of political power. Instead of having an organised form of representation, such as a party that could share in the spoils of government, particular Indo-Fijian businesses had to take whatever benefits they could get out of the Qarase-led governments that, first and foremost, represented the Taukei buccaneers. Some also sheltered under the Fiji Labour Party, which retained a degree of authority until it imploded after 2006. That is, Indo-Fijian capital — the most commercially successful and prominent local capital across many areas of the national economy — could not organise itself in a party or other cohesive form. The massive financial and other support FijiFirst received from firms and individual business people for its election campaign emphasised the extent to which the party, led by non-commercial figures, had come to represent the Indo-Fijian bourgeoisie, financial and industrial as well as other business strata.⁴

That the most important regime figures in the government do not have substantial commercial operations of their own, regardless of the allegations of individual corruption, makes it easier to mediate between the competing capitalists. Once again, a major characteristic of Bonapartism appears when considering the Bainimarama regime's capacity to take political action that 'cannot be ascribed from and to the economic state of the actors in question' (Cowen 1986:360).

Representing Labour in Capitalism

An early attempt to describe the policies of FijiFirst suggested that its election campaigning proposals were populist. This direction, Brij Lal (2014) claimed, gave FijiFirst greater support over the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) in urban and peri-urban areas. He cites the campaign promises of increased electricity subsidies for poorer families, as well as price control of some foods, free medication, and other intended policies as instances deserving this description. Unfortunately, Lal does not explain why these deserve to be labelled populist and not simply popular, directed at winning votes within the recently reconstructed and widely demanded electoral form of capitalist democracy. Instead, here, it is proposed that the government's popularity was not simply important for winning the majority of seats at the election — a characteristic of elections everywhere. Popularity is also important for the government's capacity to mediate among the local capitalist class and its commercial allies, and could well determine whether elections are held in the future or the country's political economy takes on an even more authoritarian militarised character once again.

The description populist has been undergoing a considerable revival. Having been condemned previously as 'stretched beyond all meaning' and therefore deserving of 'being retired — or at least temporarily suspended — from the vocabulary of politics altogether' (Wood 1982:69), populism and populist are now frequently attached to disparate parties, personnel, and policy proposals. Far from disappearing from common usage, populism is popular once more, including for describing campaigning in Fiji, as noted above. It is also

commonplace to hear politicians and others warn against populism and, specifically, 'dangerous populist excesses' (D'Eramo 2013). How applicable or useful, then, is the term populism to explain either the election campaigning or the subsequent post-election policies of the Bainimarama Government?

Modern populism, it should be recalled, has its origins in the advance of industrial capitalism in Europe, initially in the changes to agriculture. One tradition has at its centre the paradox that centralised control of the macroeconomy through the state is required to secure the long-term survival of decentralised 'small scale units of production and consumption' (Cowen 1984:72). As Gavin Kitching notes, such objectives as 'small and beautiful' require for their persistence in the face of competition 'the big and bureaucratic' (Kitching 1980:130, 1982). The second tradition has two dimensions: populism as 'part of state practise and policy under some conditions', and 'under others it remains as an oppositional current to the state, whether capitalist or not' (Cowen 1984:72).

There is nothing in the pre-election appeals or subsequent policies of FijiFirst and the elected government that fits the description populist, anti-capitalist, or anti-statist. Instead, as noted above, in its effort to win the majority of votes at the 2014 election, Bainimarama and FijiFirst necessarily had to be popular. With the military a key state apparatus critical for the government's power, anti-statist rhetoric or practice is even less likely. Indeed, it is hard to see how any party aiming to win government in Fiji's political economy could be either, especially when holding elections had become the primary objective for a 'return to (capitalist) democracy'. Instead, the proposed policies are clearly explicable as satisfying popular demands from voters.

Further, such policies can be most easily understood, along with the drive to improve education at all levels (see below), as government efforts to raise the capacity of the population to labour. That is, FijiFirst and the Bainimarama Government aimed and continue to aim to represent labour in capitalist accumulation. Advancing accumulation means representing the particular forms in which this occurs (urban

manufacturing, rural industries, finance, trading etc.), as well as the particular capitalists who own and organise firms operating in each arena. As the Asian Development Bank report notes, since 2010:

Growth was broad based, with investments in finance, construction, and transport leading the trend ... Fiji's macroeconomic policies continue to support growth ... With the exception of fishing and mining, all productive sectors of the economy are estimated to have grown in 2014. (ADB 2015:249–50)

It was over the representation of labour in Fiji's capitalist economy that the election campaign brought the parties together and ensured greatest prominence in their appeals to voters. The needs of capital for a healthy, skilled, and compliant labour force coincided with the needs of each party to be popular vote-winning entities. When the members of the capitalist class and their allies do not comprise a sufficient proportion of the voting population upon whom to base electoral success, popular support is essential. Elections with extended suffrage, in this case to all Fijians over 18 years of age, require that parties hoping to form government appeal to the mass of the population. The bulk of the electorate comprises those who labour in various forms, wage workers, smallholders, and so on, as well as the underemployed and unemployed who seek employment in order to meet household consumption needs. Elections also provide a particular opportunity for the needs of capital, including for a skilled labour force, to be joined in a *popular* crusade with the needs of those who labour.

As Jon Fraenkel (2015a:45) has detailed:

Bainimarama courted support in rural Cakaudrove through a series of infrastructure projects, such as completion of a 10-kilometre tar-sealed stretch of the Buca Bay Road, a nursing station, classroom extensions and a hydroelectric power station at Somosomo.

The government and FijiFirst were not the only campaigners attempting to gain support by appealing to voters. During the campaign, most

parties made general commitments to reduce poverty, with measures that included improving access to improved schools and medical facilities. This direction, of continued concern for education and health, was even more important because the continued, possibly accelerated movement of smallholders off the land increased impoverishment and enlarged the relative surplus population or industrial reserve army (Marx 1976:ch. 25).

Capital and Poverty Reduction

While estimates vary, there is little doubt that Fiji is typical globally in having a large proportion of the population impoverished, in both urban and rural areas. Further, while poverty is especially associated with unemployment and underemployment, continuing attacks on the wages of employed workers have increased the numbers of working poor, also along international lines (Narsey 2006, 2008, 2012). One long-term critic of successive government policies on poverty in the country, Father Kevin Barr, stated in late 2012, 'two thirds of Fiji's population lived in poverty or close to it' (Sharma 12/11/2012). Barr also concluded that '60 per cent of the workers in full-time employment earned wages below the poverty line and 15–20 per cent of the people lived in squatter settlements' (ibid.). What debate does exist about poverty in Fiji is conducted largely around the causes and their duration, and what measures a government can take to alleviate as well as reduce the extent of impoverishment. One frequently advocated measure is to increase accessibility and raise the standard of education.

However, increasing the education of the population by raising skills will only advance productivity and the general process of accumulation if the better-trained labour force is engaged in production, joined with other means of production in agriculture and manufacturing, including the so-called services. Unemployed mechanics, technicians, and engineers are not only subject to impoverishment, they may also threaten law and order. Most importantly of all in a capitalist political economy, they do nothing for accumulation. Given high rates of unemployment, a trend that began in Fiji in the 1980s, whatever its subsequent variations as an effect of political

crises, a major task of the current government is to coordinate and supervise the process by which the unemployed and underemployed are attached or reattached to land, machinery, office equipment and so forth to become productive (Cowen and Shenton 1996).

Urbanisation, Land and Agriculture

One side of the government's difficulties regarding employment, impoverishment and economic growth arises because of what has occurred in the countryside. As Narsey notes (2012:4): 'Rural development is probably the biggest and most intractable challenge facing Fiji'. There has been a continuing movement of population from rural to urban areas over more than five decades, so that anywhere between 30 and 50 per cent of the country's total population lives in the conurbation around Nausori-Suva-Lami in the south-east of Viti Levu. Eighty per cent of voters at the 2014 election lived on this island. While the rate of movement to urban areas has probably fluctuated, including during political crises when Indo-Fijians, particularly sugarcane farmers, left smallholdings, there is an inexorable drift of people towards urban and peri-urban life as well as commercialised production and consumption on rural smallholdings.

This population movement and the accompanying stagnation of agriculture in many rural areas has been associated with — and has even contributed to — the reduced commercial and political significance of the once-powerful landed aristocracy. Not only has the landed aristocracy, long heavily dependent upon rents for accumulation and consumption, lost out further politically through the recent election (MacWilliam forthcoming). Rentier capital, epitomised by the Taukei chiefs who feed off monies paid by cane farmers, tourist resort operators and commercial property lessees, including rents for offices occupied by state employees, is under sustained attack in Fiji. Prior to the election, the interim regime reduced the rents paid to chiefs and increased the amounts distributed to other indigenous members of the *mataqali* (the landholding unit).

Attacking rentiers, however intellectually respectable, is not the same as making agricultural land more productive — that problem still remains. The recent *Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda* produced by the Fiji Ministry of Agriculture (2014) with technical assistance from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations is subtitled 'Modernizing Agriculture'. The report is full of the usual references to improved delivery of support services, integration of production, processing, marketing and transportation, private-public partnerships, and innovative business arrangements in agribusiness. But it is ambivalent on the central question of agricultural production: how is labour to be attached to the large areas of under- and un-utilised land from which so many Fijians have moved or still occupy at low levels of productivity? Agribusiness suggests large-holdings — an industrial form of production that has had a limited presence in Fiji and that would necessitate turning either the existing rural population into wage workers, or encouraging/forcing some of the urban unemployed back into the countryside, also to work for wages in forms of industrial production. The alternative, to substantially increase the productivity of households occupying smallholdings in another industrial form, would require a major increase in a range of state activities, including agricultural extension, processing, marketing — of special importance in a country where the rural population is spread over many islands — and research. Either direction will require the heavy involvement of the state machinery and, as such, can be neither anti-statist nor anti-capitalist/opposed to accumulation (see above).

Two moves, one made prior to the election and the other subsequently, suggest how the government is trying to mediate between these forms of agricultural production. For many years, there have been objections to the importation of a range of food products, most of which are also produced in Fiji, but in insufficient quantities and qualities to meet local demand, especially from tourist hotels. In 2012, Fiji imported approximately Fiji \$865 million of food items. As the minister for agriculture in the interim regime stated:

The agriculture sector in Fiji is challenged by our dependence on imported food, low private sector participation, inadequate diverse food production and productivity and market access for our exports. High food price is another issue which has forced some families to buy cheaper food, substitutes, and has led to a decline in the consumption of nutritious food causing malnutrition. Therefore, the imports of food from dairy products, meat, fruits, vegetables and processed food items are increasingly steady over the years. (Nasiko 9/9/2013)

In July 2010, the Reserve Bank amalgamated two facilities, the Export Finance Facility and the Import Substitution Facility, into a single entity called the Import Substitution and Export Finance Facility (ISEFF). As Investment Fiji (2010), the agency established to promote commercial activities, stated, the ISEFF would:

... continue to focus on improving Fiji's balance of payments position by assisting exporters, large scale commercial agricultural farming and renewable energy businesses to obtain credit at concessional rates of interest ... Import Substitution funding under ISEFF is available to new and existing local agricultural businesses involved in import substitution. Businesses may apply for concessional funding for the production of fruits, vegetables, honey, root crops, dairy produce, beef, poultry, pig farming, aquaculture and renewable energy. However, businesses that produce items in which Fiji is already self-sufficient, such as canned meat will not be able to access funds under the Facility unless the produce is to be exported.

The Reserve Bank advanced funds for the facility to the Fiji Development Bank and licensed credit institutions at 2 per cent interest, permitting these to lend to approved borrowers at up to a maximum margin of 6 per cent additional interest. In short, the government — through the bank, the board of which had undergone major changes after the military takeover in 2006 — sought to join industrial capital in agriculture with finance

capital in the name of national self-sufficiency, and consumer needs.

Support for private firms became central to government policy prior to the election, including for those producing dairy products. However, the difficulties inherent in this support also became obvious. Imported milk prices rose substantially and became a source of public grievance during the campaign period. Similarly, moves to reduce imports of rice illustrate another dimension of the political mediations required to increase growth and advance accumulation. Rice is grown mainly by smallholders, including on irrigation projects and by tenant farmer cane growers as a second crop. With the departure of many of the latter from holdings, rice production was also hit. Attempts to expand domestic production, which commenced during the inter-war period and received intermittent attention subsequently, were revived under the interim military regime as the cost of rice imports mounted to Fiji \$40 million per year. The emphasis remained after the election. Visiting the Rice Irrigation Sector of Dreketi in Macuata, Vanua Levu, six months after the 2014 election, the minister for agriculture, another former military officer, again stressed the importance of increasing the output of rice:

He said that reducing Fiji's current rice import bill would allow more funds to be diverted towards developing more rice farms in Fiji. The Minister noted ... that more work need[ed] to be carried out to realise the full potential of the rice industry in the North. (Sivan 29/3/2015)

While processing of padi — the initial form of harvested rice — occurs primarily through industrial firms, the importance of smallholders for growing the crop has forced the government into renewed efforts to provide administration support and extension services for growers. These efforts occur when, internationally, there is considerable tightening of the relationship between supply and demand. As the International Grains Council has predicted: 'Global rice reserves are projected to fall due to declines in key exporters' (2014:14).

Sugar production provides another instance of a crop dominated by smallholders, where government efforts to increase output have been given priority.

Expanding Fiji's sugar output and exports has been an important focus of governments since independence, with the assistance of preferential tariff arrangements from the European Union. A specific focus of attention for the Bainimarama Government is on farmer training, and again on Vanua Levu, where cane farmers have either reduced production or stopped growing the crop altogether (Vula 6/3/2015).

Whichever forms agricultural increases are to take, they pose dilemmas for the government. If industrial manufacturing capitals are to predominate in large-holding farming, not only will this open up numerous fronts for opposition from chiefs as well as other *mataqali* members, possibly revitalising party representation against the government or even leading to rural revolt, SODELPA politicians could be well placed to lead whatever forms this dissatisfaction takes. Increasing large-holding agriculture would also mean adjudicating between the firms that are scrambling for farmland, processing factory assistance and government support of various forms, including tariffs if produce is to be directed at domestic markets. Expanded government support for large-holders and smallholders will not only face the by-now entrenched academic and other opposition to all forms of 'government intervention in the market', with 'import substitution' a favourite target of National Federation Party leader Biman Prasad, a former academic economist, but there will also be complaints of favouritism and corruption towards regions, crops and marketing arrangements.

There isn't the space here to extend the argument through the case of capitals involved in urban manufacturing, as important as these also would be for increasing employment and representing the demands of labour. Similarly, it is not possible here to consider productive capitals involved in what is described as service industries. A longer paper could examine the growth of tourism, which, after a short-term decline following the 2006 coup, has since expanded again (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2015).⁵

Election night TV coverage in Fiji revealed at least two features of importance for the argument presented. Firstly, that the election victory of FijiFirst was not only expected by major businesses

but welcomed, including by Flour Mills of Fiji and FHL, whose senior officers appeared as the results were being announced. Each of these firms is involved in production for domestic as well as international markets, so that government contracts, tariffs, and international shipping costs are central to their operations. Secondly, as a corollary of the first, while government is expected to improve general conditions for commercial operations in and from Fiji, it will be expected to mediate between competing concerns, favouring some and not others.

One of the directions for Fiji industry projected before the election, and which has a long history, is to make the country 'a communications hub' for the region. Given the intensely competitive international character of electronics and media markets, adjudicating such a direction will be extremely difficult. So too will increasing the training of the skilled workers who are in short supply,⁶ as well as improving internet access throughout Fiji, as noted above.

Many of the recent urban immigrants have limited formal education and labour skills required for manufacturing or service industry employment. In order to promote industrial expansion and improved living standards, the Bainimarama Government is forced to concentrate on raising the capacity for labour. At the same time, the government has constructed means to represent labour in capitalism through wage discipline, including for workers not covered by existing agreements and awards.⁷

The Centrality of Education for the Bainimarama Government

While further raising the productivity of labour is critical for the reform of capitalism in Fiji, reshaping and revitalising education is a central component of the drive to increase economic growth. Improving schooling is, as the election campaign showed, also important for garnering popular support among the voting population for future elections. As the party of the interim administration, FijiFirst was in the strongest position to develop its popular appeal across the country. A major feature of government policies prior to the election had been specific

measures undertaken to reduce education costs for primary and secondary schooling (ADB 2015: 249–50). School fees were eliminated, school bus fares removed, and other supporting measures introduced, including renovating school facilities. A frequent image of the campaigning by FijiFirst's leading figures was attendance at school functions of various kinds, including graduation ceremonies and building projects (Fraenkel 2015a). Even during the campaign and in the two-day 'blackout' on election advertising immediately prior to the poll, government billboards associating the interim prime minister with such nation-building programs remained on display.

Since the election, the public attention to education and schooling at all levels and of various forms by government ministers has continued. Education availability and standards in Fiji and other South Pacific countries — including the most populous country, Papua New Guinea — are often insufficient to train the skilled labour forces required to increase economic growth (MacWilliam 2014b). Prime Minister Bainimarama made much of the right to an education in a [post-election address to the UN Human Rights Council](#). He also linked development of a 'network of Government Telecentres across Fiji' to improve internet access throughout the country with this right of Fijian children. Subsequently, when [addressing the Council of The University of the South Pacific](#) (USP), he repeated the government's stress on formal education.

During the campaign, FijiFirst and other parties gave most attention to primary and secondary education. However, prior to the election, concerns had also been expressed about the availability of tertiary education, university and technical. For some years, USP and the Fiji National University had specifically aimed at increasing the proportion of the population of South Pacific countries that attends tertiary education institutions. As the vice chancellor of USP, Rajesh Chandra, emphasised in that university's Strategic Plan 2010–2012, the region is notable for the very small numbers of the population who undertake university education (MacWilliam 2014b:125). An expressed goal was to match international rates for this level of training.

As well as encouraging the direction at both major universities, one of the first acts of the newly elected Bainimarama Government was to provide funds for Fiji's third university, the Lautoka-based University of Fiji, to extend its presence in Samabula, Suva. Given that the University of Fiji offers courses which are similar to, if not the same as those already offered at USP and Fiji National University, the support for the University of Fiji is a further extension of the drive to increase attendance at tertiary institutions as well as a means of increasing the competition between the three universities.

Since the election, there has also been a renewed attention to technical education.⁸ When opening the new Technical College of Fiji-Vanua Levu Arya Samaj campus at Naduna in Labasa, the prime minister emphasised that the country needed:

... more of every trade discipline as the economy improves and the opportunities in the North expand. This is a vital capacity building exercise in the North as well as an unprecedented opportunity for our young people to achieve viable and worthwhile lives. (Vula 8/4/2015)

At the opening of the college, an extension of an existing network, the [prime minister also announced](#) that further technical institutions would be opened as part of this national chain in Bua, Nawaca and Wainikoro.

There are other indicators of the importance the government has placed upon extending and improving formal education opportunities and standards in Fiji. The fighting which has broken out between the new minister for education, former USP and Fiji National University academic Dr Mahendra Reddy, and the department's senior official (Swami 5/1/2015) suggests the determination of the government to take control of the administrative process in the central department responsible for any changes.

Conclusion

It has been argued here, as was done previously when examining Fiji's political economy (MacWilliam 2014a), that there is much to be gained by using international referents and experience for understanding contemporary

conditions. Whether these referents come from outside the South Pacific region or even another century at the beginning of industrialisation should not prevent employing their relevance. While using the idea of populism to describe FijiFirst's election campaign policies also satisfies the objective of internationalising and extending in time the terms of change in the country, it has been shown here that what is popular is not the same as what is populist.

While there are certainly occasions when blocs representing distinct commercial interests and directions contest elections and aim to win popular support among the voters, this is not what has occurred either prior to or since the 2014 election in Fiji. The military regime effectively ended not simply key institutions that were critical means for tying political power to economic power, including parties, trade unions, the GCC, parliament and other state agencies. The regime that came to power and extended its hold through an electoral victory also broke the previous connection between economic and political power. The Bainimarama Government has been in the process of constructing forms of mediation that are distinct from the previous direct ties between owning and operating major commercial enterprises as well as holding political office. To put it crudely, whatever may happen in the future, the Bainimarama Government is now dissimilar to that of Rabuka or Qarase, even if each is headed by a Taukei and dependent upon military support.

Instead, the designated policy proposals that were labelled populist, as well as the government's subsequent actions, have been means of garnering popular support from the bulk of the voting population. Since 2006, but especially since the election campaign, this support provides the means for organising the representation of labour within a capitalist political economy. This representation, given the stamp of approval by an overwhelming electoral victory, is one side of the same coin. The other side, for which the government is also well placed, is to represent capital, industrial and commercial, urban and rural. Being neither of

labour nor important capitalists makes it possible to mediate *on behalf of capitalism*.

While the current FijiFirst Bainimarama-led government has important similarities with that which ruled in mid-nineteenth-century France, that country's history also provides possible clues for anticipating the government's future. In attempting to mediate on behalf of all classes and strata, Bonaparte's rule became increasingly repressive. As much as the Bainimarama Government can, for now, represent most classes and strata within Fiji, mediating while retaining popularity, advancing economic growth and profitability, it is limited in its capacity to deal with the international currents that affect conditions for accumulation in a small country. Having diminished opposition to its rule in Fiji, the success or otherwise of dealing with major international changes could determine to an important extent what happens domestically.

It will be a hard act to satisfy the most important business people while maintaining popular support by improving living conditions for many who are now impoverished. Expect the extent to which continued reliance upon military support is important to be regularly revealed.

Author Notes

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Endnotes

- 1 This Discussion Paper is an extended and revised version of a seminar presentation made in the SSGM series on 23/3/2015. I am indebted to comments made by attendees at the seminar, and in particular to Anthony Regan, whose persistence encouraged the further development of the argument. John Cox urged that the paper be turned into the present form, and I am grateful for his support. The advice given by anonymous referees has been welcome.
- 2 For the most recent iterations of these themes, see the essays by Brij Lal, Stewart Firth, Robert Norton, and Jon Fraenkel in *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* (2015). Special Issue: Fiji: Elections and the Future 104(2).
- 3 Including recently in a [speech by the prime minister](#) at the High Level Segment of the 28th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, in Geneva on 2/3/2015.
- 4 I have no statistically reliable data on the amounts of money used by FijiFirst for its campaign, nor to what extent the party outspent its rivals. Attempts to collect this information have been unsuccessful. However, I was present in Fiji for some weeks during 2014, including in the week prior to the September election, and have no reason to doubt the accuracy of this conclusion. Nor has anything appeared subsequent to the election that would refute the claim made here.
- 5 For earlier work on tourism, see MacWilliam with Daveta (2003).
- 6 For a report on the establishment of the country's first Microsoft Information Technology Academy, see Prasad (5/3/2015).
- 7 A recent example of this form of representation has been the [February 2015 announcement by the minister for employment, productivity and industrial relations](#) of a wage increase to Fiji \$2.32 per hour for approximately 100,000 workers 'in the informal sector, as well as those workers in the formal sector that are not covered under the current 10 Wages Regulations'. Subsequently, the [minister reminded employers and workers on 30/6/2015](#) that the rise took effect from 1 July.
- 8 On the upgrading and rebranding of the Fiji National University's School of Maritime Studies to the Fiji Maritime Academy, with assistance from the Colombo International Nautical and Engineering College, see Bolatiki (10/3/2015).

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