

## **Electoral reform not about racial justice**

### **Professor Wadan Narsey**

Month after month, Bainimarama and coup apologists abroad keep repeating that there should be no elections until a racially fair one person-one vote system is in place.

They keep claiming that they wish to “eliminate electoral racism” against the Indo-Fijians with their proposed proportional List system.

But the fact is that the existing electoral system is not unfair on the grounds of race although it does have other weaknesses.

The old electoral system is only unfair to the smaller parties, and indeed it is far too complicated for Fiji voters.

And the proposed proportional voting system will not make any great difference from an ethnic point of view, although it will be much fairer to the smaller parties.

The real question is: why is the military government not in a hurry to educate the public about their proposed electoral reforms?

Why are articles like this one being censored from the Fiji media?

And where have all the electoral reformists in the NCBBF like David Arms, disappeared to?

### **2006 Results were “racially fair”**

Coup apologists please note: after all our elections held under the Alternative Vote system, the proportion of seats in parliament held in aggregate by the Fijian and Indo-Fijian parties have been roughly the same as their share of the votes.

Thus in the 2006 elections, the Indo-Fijian political parties (FLP and the NFP) together obtained 46% of the votes, and 44% of the seats.

The Fijian political parties (SDL, SVT, PANU, NAP) together obtained 49% of the votes, and 51% of the seats.

The existing electoral system has been roughly “racially fair”.

Indeed, in 1999, the largest Indo-Fijian Party (the Fiji Labour Party) managed to win control of the Fiji Parliament, with the same Alternative Vote electoral system. How could it be alleged that the existing electoral system has been unfair to Indo-Fijians?

## **Unfair only to small parties**

The real unfairness of the existing electoral system has been to the smaller political parties both Fijian (NAP, PANU, SVT) and the Indo-Fijian party (NFP) which could not obtain any seats at all in 2006 because they could not win more than 50% of the votes in any constituency.

While both the larger parties benefited. Thus the Fijian SDL had around 44% of the votes, but a much larger 52% of the seats.

Similarly, the Indo-Fijian FLP had 40% of the votes but a larger 42% of the seats.

The proposed proportional system will eliminate this unfairness.

## **The proposed proportional system**

How will a “proportional/List” system work for Fiji?

Leave the “List” element for the next installment. Just focus on the “proportional” bit.

Assume Fiji is one great constituency (can have 5 or 25- makes little difference)..

Assume that each voter is given only one ballot paper with the names and symbols of all the political parties wishing to stand.

Mark just one box- with a tick, or a cross, or a slash or whatever.

No numbers, no preferences, no “above the line” or “below the line”.

All the votes in the country are added up for each political party.

Each party’s share of the national votes cast, will determine that party’s share of seats in the Parliament.

Nothing could be simpler.

## **What likely results?**

Coup apologists should note that in the 2006 elections, the 25 Open Constituencies were exactly the “Common Rolls” they are calling for: with any ethnic person free to stand as a candidate and all voters, whatever their race, having only one vote.

In 2006, the political parties received the following votes and proportions, and they would have been entitled to the following numbers of seats in a “proportional” system.

[Ignore for this article the 17,717 votes for Independents who won 2 seats, the “General” political parties who won 2 seats, and the special 1 Rotuman seat].

### Results from 2006 Elections (Total Seats)

Party	Open Votes	Percent. Of votes	Seats Entitled	Seats Actually Received
SDL	170186	46.8	<b>33</b>	<b>36</b>
NAP	12971	3.6	<b>3</b>	
PANU	2191	0.6		
NVTLP	1454	0.4		
FLP	153494	42.2	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>
NFP	23594	6.5	<b>5</b>	
	363890	100.0	<b>71</b>	

Note: the Indo-Fijian political parties (FLP and NFP) together received 49% of the votes, and would be allocated 49% of the seats.

The Fijian political parties received 51% of the votes and would together get 51% of the seats.

*The result would be racially fair, virtually the same as the actual results in 2006.*

Except that under the proportional system, the smaller parties NFP and NAP would be very fairly allocated 5 and 3 seats respectively they did not get.

Under the Alternative Vote system, these 8 seats would have unfairly gone to the SDL and the FLP.

So the proposed proportional voting system will not be making the electoral system racially fairer.

It will just make it fairer for the smaller parties.

It will indeed be supreme irony that the FLP which has supported the coup alleging the current electoral system is unfair, will lose seats to the NFP, which has steadfastly opposed the coup on sound principles of supporting constitutionality and the law.

And the FLP will also go down in history as having helped to remove the multi-party provision which provided a guarantee that the eventual government would not result in the “tyranny of the majority”. Removing the multi-party provision also removes the guarantee of Indo-Fijian representation in Cabinet.

So, coup apologists, please stop claiming that the proposed electoral system is intended to deliver racial justice to the Indo-Fijians.

*People in Fiji could try to speed up the return to a democratic parliamentary government by understanding how it would be a major improvement for Fiji to have a one person, one vote, proportional voting system, with a “List” element. Call the Military Government’s bluff.*

[Next installment: Part 2: How can a List system work together with the “proportional” system]