

The Charter Charade
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(*The Fiji Times*, 23 December 2008)

Did 92% of more than 400 thousand adults consulted really approve the Charter?

Please, Fiji people, do not bother checking or counting the forms. First ask: was the Charter Approval Process a fair and independent opinion poll?

Any good researcher, university student, ADB consultant, lawyer, or seasoned politician, should know the basics: the interviewer's own views should not be made known to the person being polled; and the polling must be done in secret, with the public not afraid of victimization.

If these polling basics are compromised in any way, the results will be biased. It does not matter how accurate your computer analysis is afterwards. Computer experts call it the GIGO principle: "Garbage In, Garbage Out".

And because of the way the Charter Approval exercise was carried out, no one knows what the real opinions were of the people who signed these forms. Or whether they understood what was in the Charter; or how different it is from the 1997 Constitution.

The alleged 92% approval result, is just so much garbage.

Samy's Charter Poll

Months ago, John Samy correctly stated on national TV that a national referendum would be the ideal way to go, but would be too expensive.

Now, John Samy solemnly informs the nation that his NCBBF teams have consulted more than 425 thousand people aged 18 and over, all over Fiji. Note, this is about the same number that voted in the 2006 General Elections.

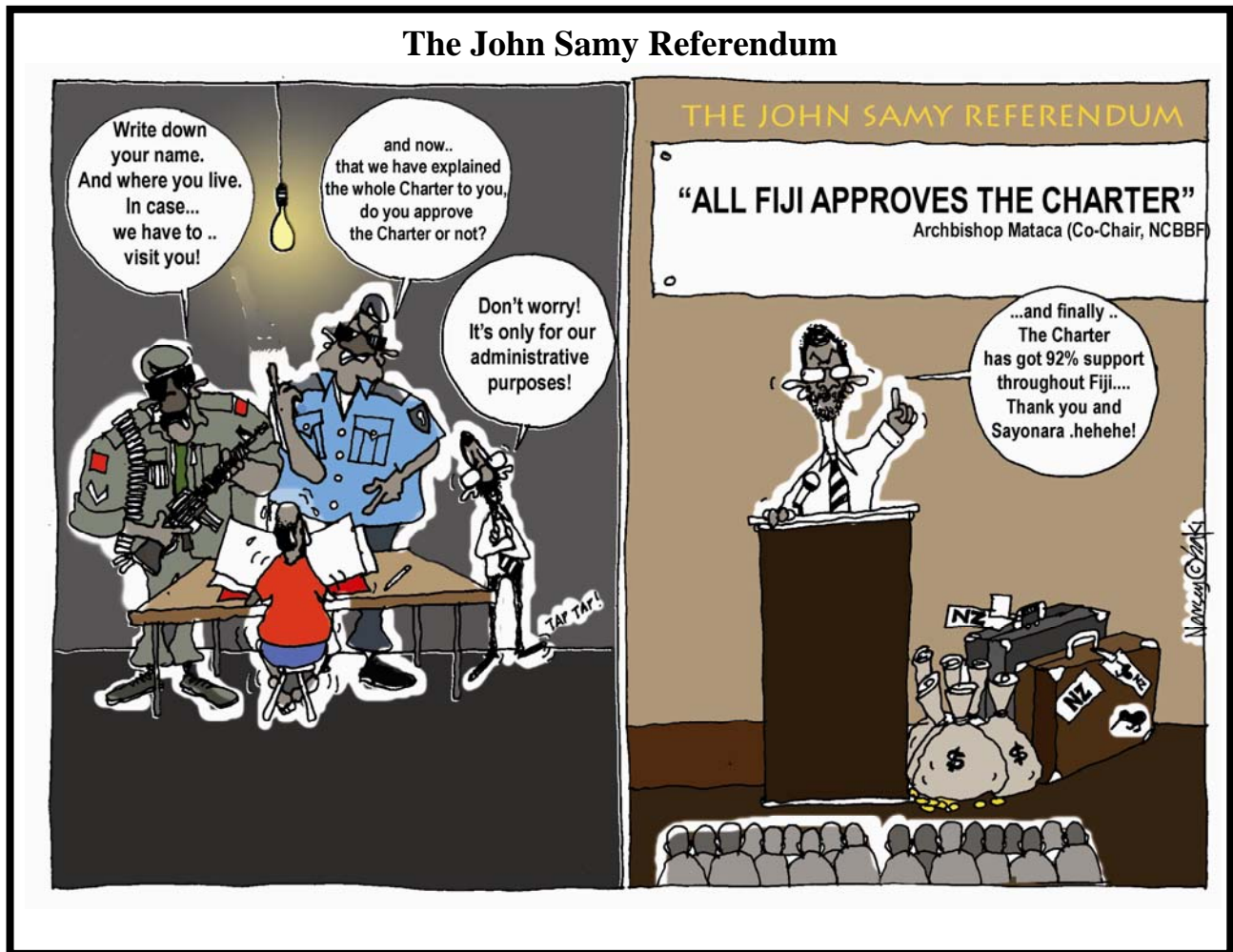
And he proudly informed the nation, with a gentle smile, that 372 thousand of our adults (92% of those consulted) had approved the Charter.

What lovely statistics. But what garbage.

Signing under duress

Robin Nair (an experienced lawyer) and his "expert" "Independent Monitoring Group" (including an experienced Vanuatu politician) have suddenly developed "collective ignorance" about their ability to assess the Charter opinion poll result. They want to waste more tax-payers' money to hire more "polling specialists" to check it out. What a cop-out.

The John Samy Referendum



You don't need to be a polling specialist to know that the Charter Approval Process was totally flawed.

The Interim Government, the military and the police leadership have already made numerous public statements in support of the Charter.

Military and police personnel, and civil servants then visited hundreds of thousands of largely uneducated people and told them how good the Charter was going to be for them and for Fiji. How long did this take?

Then the public were asked to write on a form, their names, their addresses, and whether they approved the Charter or not.

Even a totally deaf 83 year old woman in Sigatoka, mother of a prominent citizen I know, was spoken to for just five minutes, and asked to sign the form.

How on earth can this process be regarded as an "independent opinion poll".

John Samy and Bainimarama would have known, right from the beginning, that such a Charter approval process was fundamentally flawed, and would never be accepted by any ethical person, or the international community.

But they went ahead anyway. What a cruel and callous misuse of millions of dollars of scarce tax-payers funds.

What a sick charade, from beginning to end.

Charter versus 1997 Constitution

The Interim Government, the NCBBF, John Samy, and the coup supporters have all alleged that the 1997 Constitution was seriously flawed.

They keep repeating that only the Charter can take Fiji forward. No Charter, no elections, threatened Frank Bainimarama.

Of course, there is a proposed electoral reform.

But did any one of the hundreds of Charter education teams explain to the public what else is in the Charter that is not covered directly or indirectly by the 1997 Constitution or our normal development plans?

Indeed, have the Interim Government, the NCBBF (including the Co-Chair Archbishop Mataka), John Samy and the President's Office ever explained that? Can they?

What President's endorsement?

In presenting the Peoples Charter to the President, the Co-Chair of the NCBBF Archbishop Petero Mataka stated "The draft Peoples Charter reached the whole of Fiji and it has the view of the people in which they want the country to move forward... to a better Fiji, a new Fiji."

What a disgraceful insinuation that the majority of the Fiji people support the Charter.

And how equally disgraceful that the President should "endorse" this Charter and ask the Interim Government to implement its 11 "pillars".

Where does our 1997 Constitution give the powers to a President appointed by the military after a coup, to "endorse" any document (which also includes changes to our electoral system) produced by a non-constitutional body like the NCBBF?

And let us note for the record, who are all these actors who make this Charter Charade possible and their possible motivations.

The Charade Actors

One can understand the hundreds of civil servants on the Charter Awareness Teams who were just following orders, in order to protect their jobs and incomes.

No doubt the Charter architect, John Samy, may have been quite proud that he was at the helm of a social and political revolution, with consultancy fees thrown in for good measure.

One can understand the *badla* (revenge) motivation of the FLP stalwarts who joined the Interim Government. The FLP has been twice denied their democratic right to govern Fiji, and now the SDL is getting a taste of its own medicine. How satisfying to follow the dictum, “the enemy (Fiji Military Forces) of my enemy (SDL) is my friend”.

One can understand the satisfaction of the head of the Catholic Church, who having watched for decades, the Methodist Church at the helm of Fiji’s leadership, has now done his bit in the sun, to “take the country forward”. And his clerics will also be happy that “their” Charter proposal for electoral reform will be implemented, whatever the impact the coup has on the rest of the country.

And of course, the elite leaders of the Hindu organisations (like Arya Samaj and the Sanatan Dharam) are happy that Bainimarama and the Charter keep repeating the mantra of racial equality. Isn’t it great that a few elite Indo-Fijians are being appointed to high places and some businessmen are doing very well out of the coup. And hopefully the poorest Indo-Fijians will forget their poverty, lack of jobs and low wages, because they will have the great satisfaction of being called “Fijians” like the *itaukei*?

One can understand the motivations of those in the CCF who disliked the politics of the SDL so much, as to support a treasonous coup as a solution, and fall in behind the Charter and NCBBF. Parroting the mantra of accountability, transparency and good governance seems to bring in the millions, even from EU.

But where do all these Charter supporters think the military will take this country, now that the Charter has been endorsed by the military’s President, the new supreme law in the land?

Where to now?

Two years on, there has been no evidence of electoral fraud in 2006, or widespread corruption.

While the Chief Justice was removed for two years on full pay, \$275 thousand dollars of tax-payers’ money (and goodness knows how much in lawyers’ fees) have now been callously used to make him go away.

The Charter now remains the only excuse for the 2006 coup by Bainimarama and the military.

Hundreds of thousands of these glossy Charter documents are scattered all over the country, too smooth to be even used for toilet paper- while the Ministry of Education supposedly does not have the budget to buy free text-books and learning materials for thousands of poor children.

The Charter and the Charter Approval Exercise has been a total waste of time, energy and scarce taxpayers funds.

It will also be a total waste of time and resources if Charter opponents go around getting signatures of people, for presenting to the President. Why bother?

The public and the political parties could simply accept the electoral reform being proposed and hold elections under it.

Don't even bother having a special referendum, by secret ballot, on this Charter. For not only does the Charter have nothing new in it, neither does it have anything evil, whatever its evil origins.

If the extremists wish to oppose the use of the word "Fijian" for all Fiji nationals, I am sure the FMF will oblige. Hardly anyone really cares about this issue, as the Tebbutt Poll indicates. What our poor people want is jobs, good incomes, and political stability.

It is time for all of us, including *Fiji Times* columnists, to stop wasting our scarce time and energy on this Charter Charade.