Labour and Gold in Fiji
Labour and Gold in Fiji

by

'Atu Emberson-Bain
Foreword

I have a high regard for Dr 'Atu Emberson-Bain personally and intellectually, and for her work on labour relations in the Fijian gold-mines. Her background and intellectual formation give her unusual advantages for the analysis of such an ‘intermediate’ and transitional society as that of the Vatukoula miners, and she has used her opportunities well. Her book is of wide interest to those concerned with the economic and social problems of Third World countries.

It will be obvious to any reader that there can be no question as to Dr Emberson-Bain's thorough and meticulous scholarship. The book is a very substantial contribution, indeed probably definitive for its theme. It is well organised and clearly written, the great mass of empirical data is ably marshalled. Dr Emberson-Bain shows herself well aware of the current comparative literature, e.g. on African mining communities, and handles it well; her theory is not obtrusive, but relevant.

For the Pacific region, socioeconomic studies seem to have concentrated mainly on the problems of primary producers, farmers or fishermen, in their relations to the intrusive market economy; on petty entrepreneurs, and on the drift from the land to such quasi-metropolitan centres as Suva or Port Moresby or Noumea. I think Dr Emberson-Bain's book is a pioneer study of a discrete community living and working in a relatively isolated company town. As such it should be of much interest to readers in a number of related disciplines concerned with the changing social structures of Pacific Islanders, and beyond that to those interested in the Third World generally.

Oskar Spate
Australian National University
Dedication

For my mother, Betty Emberson-Bain, and in loving memory of my grandmother Matilda Emberson: two women who, in different ways, continue to be an inspiration to me.
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Acknowledgements

The genesis of this book was a doctoral thesis in history at the Australian National University in Canberra, and it was through that university's generous four-year scholarship that I was able to begin my voyage of discovery into the mine labour market of Fiji. In some respects this voyage began even before the shaky beginnings of the thesis, when in the seminar room of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, I was captivated by the stimulating debates of a group of UK-based South African historians, including Shula Marks, Charles van Onselen, Harold Wolpe and Stanley Trapido. This experience as a young postgraduate in the late 1970s is one that undoubtedly fuelled my interest in labour history and influenced my decision to research the history of Fiji's goldmining industry.

Research for this book in its earlier thesis form was undertaken in Fiji and Australia, where I was assisted by many institutions and individuals, particularly staff of the Melbourne University Archives of Business and Labour; the Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour; the National Library of Australia, Canberra; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; and the Research Library of the Sydney Stock Exchange. I would like to make special mention of the Fiji Government, which in the early 1980s granted me unrestricted access to the records of the Colonial Secretary's Office accommodated at the National Archives, including open files inside the thirty-year period and confidential files. My thanks go to the archivist, Setareki Tuinaceva, and staff, especially Margaret Patel, whose support has remained solid throughout the ten years spanning both thesis and book endeavours.

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Acknowledgements

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Space does not permit me to name the many company staff, union and government officers and others who kindly agreed to be interviewed or gave me valuable assistance. I derived much benefit from discussions with Ruskin Ward and Bill Cornwall (Emperor staff), Sakiasi Waqanivavalagi, Navitalai Raqona, Sainusi Waininima, Mesake Cirimawaiwa, Kavekini Navuso and Alifereti Waqa (FMWU), the late Dr Timoci Bavadera (deposed Labour-NFP Coalition Prime Minister), Tevita Fa (legal counsel to the Nasomo people), Mahendra Chaudhry (FTUC), the late Sir Robert Taylor (Economic Adviser and Financial Secretary, Government of Fiji 1947–52), R. D. Patel (former Member of Legislative Council), Karl Fleischman (former Inspector of Mines), Father Richard Keelan (Xavier College, Ba), and the late Herbert Murray (former member of the Mining Board). I am grateful to Peter Walker (Acting Principal Engineer, Mines) for sharing his technical knowledge of the mining industry and for answering endless questions, to David Greenbaum (former government Economic Geologist), Alfred Simpson (Assistant Director of Mineral Development), Nevil Ebsworth (former Principal Engineer, Mines), Peter Rodda (Principal Geologist, Information), and Raja Ram (former Chief Labour Officer), who helped me in various ways. The Ministry of Information, Department of Mineral Resources and the Fiji Times kindly made available most of the photographs that are included in this book, and Asaeli Lave and Sylvia Low laboured to produce quality products. Paul Geraghty (Fijian Dictionary Project), Amelia Rokotuivuna, Viniana Buitora and Ann Nacola generously assisted with Fijian translations.

I would like to express special thanks to Emperor Gold Mining Co. Ltd and in particular, its Managing Director, Jeffrey Reid, for granting me access to the enormous volume of correspondence files and other private records of the Emperor, Loloma and Dolphin mining companies of Vatukoula. The company facilitated my research by providing office space and also made accommodation available during the field trips I undertook between 1982 and 1983 with a young baby in tow. In the Blatchlords I had a special Sydney 'family', who gave me a wonderful home away from home, shared their rich memories of life at Vatukoula in the 1940s and 1950s, and facilitated contact with other retired company staff living in Australia. I am well aware, and can only regret, that company staff who helped make this book possible may not agree with my conclusions.
Notwithstanding the company's generosity, I should mention that the wide-ranging discussions and (informal) interviews I had with miners and their families at Vatukoula were generally constrained by the realities of life in a company-run town. Given these circumstances, I am enormously indebted to the many workers who succumbed to my persistent proddings and agreed to share their experiences and views, which often included vivid recollections of the early days of labour recruitment, mine work and life in the mining town. I am especially grateful to the Vatukoula relations I discovered and came to know, the Corrie family, who provided me with boundless hospitality, humour and information. To the elders and people of Nasomo, may I also express my appreciation.

Without doubt, however, my greatest debt is to my family for whom this journey of mine has almost certainly been a joyless trial. Sitiveni’s support and love have been far more than I ever deserved, and three little people, Siale, Anga’ae fonu and Melino, who have popped up at odd intervals along the way, have in different ways, and to different degrees, endured more dislocation (as well as the sharp edge of a deranged mother) than is probably healthy for them. My brother, Ashley, and mother were at different stages of the project persuaded into the unenviable roles of research assistant and companion to me. My parents, Kenneth Bain and Betty Emberson Bain, have contributed critical comments, proofing assistance and crucial moral support. Last, but perhaps most important of all, have been the very special support of two surrogate mothers for my children, Rosa Mavoli Lewalewa, who accompanied me on my thesis fieldwork in Fiji and endured long cold months in Australia away from her family, and Viniana Buitora, who loyalty bore the brunt of the second, post-thesis phase of my obsession with Vatukoula. Without them, this book would not have materialised.

'Atu Emberson-Bain
Suva
List of Abbreviations

ADB  Australian Dictionary of Biography
BHP  Broken Hill Proprietary Co. Ltd
C/L  Commissioner of Labour
CO  Colonial Office
CP  Council Paper
CS  Colonial Secretary
CSO  Colonial Secretary's Office
CSR  Colonial Sugar Refining Co. Ltd
Cwt  hundredweight
DC  District Commissioner
DMS  Director of Medical Services
DO  District Officer
dwt  pennyweight, unit corresponding to one-twentieth of a troy ounce
EGM  Emperor Gold Mining Co. Ltd
EML  Emperor Mines Ltd
ETI  Emperor Timber Industries Ltd
FAB  Fijian Affairs Board
FECA  Fiji Employers' Consultative Association
FMD  Fiji Mines Development Ltd
FMWU  Fiji Mineworkers’ Union
FS  Fiji Sun
FT  Fiji Times
FT & H  Fiji Times & Herald

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List of Abbreviations xix

GM General Manager
ILO International Labour Organisation
IOM Inspector of Mines
IOM & ME Inspector of Mines & Mining Engineer
JCC Joint Consultative Council
Leg Co Legislative Council, Fiji
LGML Loloma (Fiji) Gold Mines No Liability
MB Mining Board
ML mining lease
MMSA Methodist Mission Collection, Fiji National Archives
MP Medical Practitioner
MR Mineral Resources Division Library, Fiji Government
MSE Melbourne Stock Exchange Mining Collection
NFP National Federation Party
NLTB Native Land Trust Board
NUM National Union of Mineworkers
OAGF Officer Administering the Government of Fiji
PC Provincial Commissioner
PIM Pacific Islands Monthly
PP Parliamentary Paper
PPO Public Record Office
RCAF Roman Catholic Archives of Fiji
SFA Secretary for Fijian Affairs
SMH Sydney Morning Herald
SML special mining lease
SNA Secretariat for Native Affairs
TNC transnational corporation
TPP Tavua Power Proprietary Co. Ltd
Vat. Vatukoula
WMC Western Mining Corporation
A NOTE ON CURRENCY

Fiji currency is used in the text unless indicated otherwise. Pounds, shillings and pence were replaced by dollars and cents on 13 January 1969.

EQUIVALENTS

1 ounce = approx. 30 grams
1 acre = approx. 0.4 hectare
1 ton = approx. 1 tonne
1 lb. (pound) = approx. 0.500 grams
1 pint = approx. 0.600 millilitres
1 foot = approx. 30 centimetres
1 dwt = approx. 1.555 grams

ORTHOGRAPHY

In Fijian b is pronounced mb, as in number; c is pronounced th as in that; d is pronounced nd as in find; g is pronounced ng as in singer; q is pronounced ng as in finger.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In line with company practice after the Second World War the term 'Part-European' has been used in this book to describe persons of mixed (commonly Fijian and European) descent. The terms 'half-caste' (typical of the pre-war years) and 'Euronesian', both of which are frequently found in company correspondence (and which are retained here when they appear in quotations) were used interchangeably with 'Part-European'. The term 'Indian' does not refer to workers recruited from India. It was used by the mining companies (in accordance with colonial convention) to describe Indo-Fijians. 'Indian' remains the official classification today. While the term is problematic, it is used in the text to avoid confusion.
### Glossary

<table>
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<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>buli</td>
<td>government-appointed district chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dalo</td>
<td>taro, a staple root crop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degei</td>
<td>chiefly ancestral god in the form of a snake, believed to live in the Nakauvadra mountain range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galala</td>
<td>literally meaning free, but generally used to refer to the independent or ‘free’ farmer usually living outside the village and exempt from communal obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kumala</td>
<td>literally meaning free, but generally used to refer to the independent or ‘free’ farmer usually living outside the village and exempt from communal obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lala</td>
<td>the conscription of goods and services (tribute) by a chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leqa</td>
<td>trouble(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loloma</td>
<td>gift, offering, greetings, love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luveniwai vaka viti</td>
<td>traditional healer or medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mana</td>
<td>special powers, believed to be divinely ordained, held by chiefs or others in authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masi</td>
<td>beaten bark cloth made from the paper mulberry tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matanagata</td>
<td>face of the snake, traditional Fijian name for Vatukoula</td>
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<tr>
<td>matanivanua</td>
<td>spokesperson or herald (traditionally male) for a chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mataqali</td>
<td>the primary, patrilineal social division of a village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ratu</td>
<td>man of chiefly rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roko tui</td>
<td>head of provincial administration; sometimes also a title given to persons of rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rourou</td>
<td>green leafy vegetable (from the dalo plant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soqosoqo</td>
<td>association or group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tabu</td>
<td>sacred or sacred thing, taboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tabua</td>
<td>sperm whale’s tooth used in ceremonial presentations or exchanges</td>
</tr>
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<td>taralala</td>
<td>popular Fijian dance in pairs</td>
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<td>indigenous Fijian landowners</td>
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<tr>
<td>teitei</td>
<td>food garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tui</td>
<td>chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turaga ni koro</td>
<td>government appointed village headman, not necessarily a chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turaga</td>
<td>chief, man of rank or status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vale ni mate</td>
<td>house of death, hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vanua</td>
<td>land; political grouping or association of villages under one chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatukoula</td>
<td>rock of gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vulagi</td>
<td>visitor, outsider, alien, foreigner</td>
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In the Beginning
(A legend from Saivou, Ra)

During the late nineteenth century, some time after the fortified village of Nakorowaiwai had been under gun attack, the ancestral god Navosavakadua spoke to two elderly brothers, one of whom was called Taivesi, whose great grandfather was the Tui Naliwane of Nacareva, Nasova, in Navuni. Navosavakadua instructed the brothers to undertake a journey to Matanagata. They were to carry a sack of putrid soil that contained the remains of those who had been killed at Nakorowaiwai and to bury them in a hilly place called Tolevu, not far from Matanagata. Under no circumstances were they to look around or behind them.

The two men went on their way and eventually arrived close to the designated area. However, the younger brother was unfortunately suffering from yaws of the foot, and when he trod on some thorny grass he collapsed in pain. He cried out to his brother, who was walking ahead of him, ‘Alas, I am finished. My legs are giving way. I feel weak. Something is happening here. Turn around. There is an old man (spirit) who has fallen out of the ivi tree, and he is staring at me from behind. Turn around, I can’t walk. Let’s pour the soil out here.’ The older brother turned back and they both set to work to bury the soil.

On their return journey, as they reached Drauniivi, the brothers met Navosavakadua. They were severely reprimanded for their disobedience. ‘You two have not returned from Tolevu as you were told,’ he chided. ‘You have buried the soil in the wrong place. Why did you stamp on it? You have both been foolish. Because of what you have done, the soil will be dug up before the time is right. The soil was to have brought great wealth to our government and people. It was to have provided for our people.’

And so it came to pass: the riches of the soil at Matanagata were discovered and enjoyed by others.