

At a constitutional conference in London in 1965, there was a difference of view between the Indians, who wanted a common electoral roll, and the Fijians and Europeans, who favoured a communal roll. A partial compromise was effected, involving a combination of communal and cross-voting systems, which did not satisfy the predominantly Indian Federation Party led by Dr. A. D. Patel. A boycott of the Legislative Council by the Federation Party and subsequent inter-racial tension over by-elections in 1968 led party leaders to the realization that a new effort was required to find a basis for inter-party understanding. After the death of Dr. Patel in October 1968, Mr. S. M. Koya was chosen as leader of the National Federation Party and successfully pursued the talks with Ratu Mara. On January 17, 1970, Ratu Mara and Mr. Koya issued a joint statement saying:

Inter-party discussions have led to the point where it is agreed Fiji should proceed to Dominion status... as soon as possible without fresh elections being held beforehand.

At the second Constitutional Conference in London from 20 April to 5 May, 1970, it was agreed that Fiji should seek independence on October 10, the ninety-sixth anniversary of cession. The Constitution provides for maintenance of traditional ties with the British Crown, a Governor General, an appointed Senate, a 52-member House of Representatives with continuation during the first post-independence elections of the communal and cross-voting system and subsequent appointment of a Royal Commission to make recommendations. Thus differences over electoral procedures were submerged in order to make progress on early independence.

In his independence broadcast, the new Prime Minister said:

We are a community of many races, with different cultures, customs and languages but the things that unite us far outnumber those on which we differ.... Above all, there is our fixed determination to build a strong, united Fiji, rich in its diversity and tempered with tolerance, goodwill and understanding.

Commonwealth and UN Membership

On becoming independent, Fiji indicated its intention to remain a member of the Commonwealth. On October 14, Fiji became the one hundred and twenty-seventh member of the United Nations. In addressing the General Assembly on October 24, the Prime Minister expressed the hope that, so far as it was authorized by its friends and neighbours, Fiji hoped to act as a representative and interpreter of the peoples of the South Pacific. The South Pacific Conference and Commission had met in Suva just before independence and Fiji was expected to become an influential full member. It could be expected to change from being an associate to a full member of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East and the Asian Development Bank. Initially, Fiji will have only three diplomatic missions — in London, in Canberra and at the United Nations.

Fiji's economy has been based largely on sugar and coconuts, whose production does not grow quickly enough, due to quotas and low world prices, to support the population growth. Fortunately there has been a recent rapid