

## *Fiji Acquires its Independence*

ON October 10, 1970, in a ceremony in Albert Park, Suva, on the island of Viti Levu, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales handed the Constitutional Instruments of Independence to Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, first Prime Minister of independent Fiji. The occasion was the ninety-sixth anniversary of the cession of Fiji by its high chiefs to Queen Victoria. Fiji's new sky-blue flag, with the Union Jack next the staff and the Fiji coat-of-arms in the fly, was then hoisted and the Fiji Military Force, in their red tunics and white *sulus*, fired a *feu-de-joie*, while a battery of field guns fired a 21-gun salute.

Fiji's independence celebrations combined the precision of parades by the Fiji Military Force and Band with traditional Fijian and Indian ceremonies. Fijian high chiefs in traditional grass skirts and cloaks of *tapa* cloth sat on mats to prepare a special drink from *yaqona* root in a ceremonial three-legged wooden *tanoa* bowl to welcome Prince Charles. A mountain of 14,000 yams and *dalo* roots, 119 freshly-slaughtered pigs, and 23 great sea-turtles from the 14 provinces of Fiji were presented to him. Regional dances of welcome, called *meke*, were performed by lines of grass-skirted Fijian warriors, chanting and brandishing spears. They were followed by Indian dancers and drummers.

Twenty thousand people watched the independence celebrations, including representatives from about 30 countries and South Pacific territories. Canada was represented by the Minister of Justice, the Honourable John Turner, and Mrs. Turner and by the Canadian High Commissioner to Australia and Mrs. Arthur Menzies.

### **Gift Presentation**

On the afternoon of Independence Day, Mr. Turner presented to the Prime Minister Canada's independence gift, a painting by the British Columbia artist E. J. Hughes entitled "Mill Bay". He also handed over copies of the reports of the Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, in which the Prime Minister had expressed an interest. Mr. Menzies presented to the Prime Minister a letter of introduction signed by Prime Minister Trudeau appointing him to serve concurrently as Canadian High Commissioner to Fiji while retaining his residence in Canberra.

Fiji consists of 844 volcanic and coral islands, about 100 of them inhabited, with a total area of 7,055 square miles. The two main islands are Viti Levu (4,010 square miles) and Vanua Levu (2,137 square miles). Viti Levu has more than 70 per cent of the population, including the capital, Suva (55,000), and the international airport, Nadi. Suva is 3,000 miles southwest of Honolulu, 2,000 miles northeast of Sydney and 1,300 miles north of Auckland.

The Fijians are Melanesian in origin, with an admixture of Polynesian. Abel Tasman sighted the Fiji islands in 1644. In 1774 Captain Cook anchored