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The Political Career of David Wilkinson, 1864-1910.

(His influence on the development of Colonial Policy in Fiji.)

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INTRODUCTION

"When the history of Fiji comes to be written, there will be many figures to stand out with strange lights and shades of questionable success and magnificent failures, among the pioneers. Of this historically picturesque group, one of the most prominent members will be Mr. David Wilkinson."

(Extract from obituary FIJI TIMES
12-1-1910)

Prophecy was not the gift of David Wilkinson's obituarist. At the time of his death, Wilkinson's work in native affairs was seen by his contemporaries as erroneous and futile. The protectionist policies he implemented and his enduring belief that the Fijian race would survive appeared to be mistakes. The Fijian population was then, still in decline. Protection which had failed to halt the decline was believed to be an impediment to the general prosperity of the colony.

Ironically, it was contemporary recognition and not rejection of Wilkinson's policy that resulted in his historical obscurity. Seeking maximum utilisation of Wilkinson's knowledge and abilities he was not assigned to any single government department but was instead a floating advisor, available to all departments. The destruction of Wilkinson's papers and diaries also contributed to his obscurity. Even so it is difficult to comprehend the neglect by historians of a man whose career spans almost fifty years of Fijian colonial history, and whose influence presumably affected native policy. The existing, though fragmentary, evidence of contemporary colonists

and the early governors, indicates the significance of Wilkinson in the formulation of policy in Fiji.

In Fijian history Wilkinson is known as; secretary to Tui Bua, trader and planter with an interest in consular affairs, chief interpreter, native commissioner, native lands commissioner and a member of the legislative council. Wilkinson was not unique in this, both J.B. Thurston and R.S. Swanston held the position of secretary to a native chief and later official positions under the colonial government. Nor was the role limited to Fiji. It was a role created by a particular phase of the culture-contact process which occurred throughout the Pacific. The positions held by Pritchard in Tahiti, Baker in Tonga and Stienburger in Samoa can be considered parallels.

Wilkinson's first visit to Fiji lasted five months and occurred in 1861. He was then thirty years old and arrived in the capacity of agent for the Fijian Company, a speculative venture formed by a group of Adelaide businessmen. In 1864 he resigned from his post as company manager and removed his family from Kioa to Bua, where he became secretary, advisor and business partner of the Tui Bua.

As secretary to the chief, Wilkinson played an important part in the development of Bua, assisting the chief to adapt and cope with the encroachments of growing numbers of Europeans. Wilkinson was

instrumental in the establishment of the Bua government with its western-style laws, applicable to both native and settler. He held the position of secretary for ten years, up to the cession of Fiji to Britain. Although he held no official position in connection with the British Consulate, he was closely associated with the work of Consul Jones (1864 - 1866) in the various attempts to establish a confederation of native chiefs and in the task of peace-keeping.

It was during this decade of close association with Tui Bua that Wilkinson learnt to speak fluent Fijian and acquired that "apparently intuitive understanding of the native mind" which was later to prove invaluable to the first colonial governors.

There are aspects of Wilkinson's career which set him apart from his contemporaries. Wilkinson's position as interpreter-advisor to a native chief was not unique, but, his transference of this role, intact, to the 'white chief', Sir Arthur Gordon, the first Colonial Governor was. Connotations of a 'power behind the throne' relationship evoked by the nature of this position. While this can be partially negated by the confident strength of Sir Arthur Gordon's character, the idea cannot be entirely dismissed. Of necessity, all the Governor's communications with the Fijians were channelled through his interpreter. Thus, Wilkinson had the scope; in his awareness of intended policy and opportunity as the Governor's constant companion to

influence policy. He could focus attention on neglected areas, emphasize aspects he considered important, or persuade against the implementation of certain policies. The planters and colonists who disliked Gordon's concept of Colonial Rule blamed Wilkinson, amongst others, as the originator of his perverse policies.

Wilkinson's successful transference of his advisory role was not due to his strength of character but to Gordon's deference to his experience. Gordon whilst believing that he had a close relationship with the Fijian people, could not but concede that Wilkinson's understanding and knowledge of the race exceeded his own, when his experience of them was channelled through Wilkinson. Both men were paternalistic, favouring protectionist policies. On the major issues, land alienation, the preservation of chiefly responsibility, native custom and labour, both men were in agreement.

The nature of their paternalism differed in origin. Gordon's attitude was that of a Victorian gentleman of humanist persuasion - beneficent but heavy with condescension. His protectionist policies were politically expedient. Wilkinson's very individual ideas on native matters were the product of his long and close working relationship with the Fijian chiefs and people. From his ability to speak fluent Fijian and from working with the Fijians, Wilkinson developed an unrivalled awareness of their customs and problems. Often, that which was taken as commonplace

and obvious by the Europeans was totally alien to the Fijian. Lack of comprehension, not ineptitude, was the root of the native error. Wilkinson had no doubts as to the Fijian capacity to perform any duty on a par with their European counterparts once the task had been sufficiently explained to them.

Many of Gordon's protectionist policies were pursued in the face of the antagonism from the bulk of the resident European community. Wilkinson's sympathy with Gordon's policy was a major factor in the establishment of indirect rule in Fiji. Although many government officials had a genuine concern for the consequences of the policies they implemented, their sojourn in Fiji was only a temporary phase in their official positions in other parts of the Empire. Wilkinson's concern was of a more personal nature. As Fiji was his home, all official policies had a direct bearing on Wilkinson's future prosperity, as well as that of the colony.

The majority of planters, those who arrived with the cotton boom, were eager to gain a quick return and large profit on their capital. They were not disposed to view favourably the long term aims of government policies when these conflicted in the short term with their aspiration. Wilkinson was a planter but he did not share the prejudices and demands made by this group at the expense of the Fijians. Having recognised that his interests could best be served by

adapting to the existing traditional system, Wilkinson became an untiring and enthusiastic champion of native rights, especially over the land and labour issues. His business partnership with the Tui Bua shielded him from the effects of the protectionist policies which produced problems for his fellow planters. His involvement with these policies won him many enemies among the colonists.

It was not only disgruntled settlers who criticised Wilkinson for his part in the establishment of the 'misguided' native policy. Arriving in 1904 as the Governor, Sir Everard Im Thurn attempted to revise Gordon's protectionism and return to direct rule. During this attempt, Im Thurn strongly criticised Wilkinson's official conduct with regard to native affairs and the land question. He also threw doubts on Wilkinson's character and competency in his position as Chief Interpreter. The criticism might have been less severe had the policies Sir Everard was trying to change and which Wilkinson had spent his life and career implementing been less firmly entrenched.

In retrospect, Wilkinson's role needs to be reassessed. In the sixty-eight years since his death many changes have taken place in Fijian society. In the 1920's Wilkinson's belief in the survival of the race was justified by a rapid rise in the population. The Fijians who had retained control over large areas of land were in a position to exert a strong influence

on the economy and hence in politics. The experience they acquired in administration and government, during the period of indirect rule, facilitated their taking a politically dominant position after independence.

It has been argued that Fijian recovery has been not due to the assumed paternalism of the colonial rulers of the mid nineteenth century but in spite of them. The real debt is due to those administrators who, like Wilkinson, retained their faith in the future of the Fijian people and in the importance of preserving their culture, in spite of the 'scientific opinion' of the day, which, regarded such an exercise as futile. Wilkinson's beliefs and the policies he helped establish were retained despite efforts to dislodge them. From a twentieth century prospective they appear to have been not only valid but fruitful.

Chapter One:

New horizons, new ideas.

'When Mr. Wilkinson came the laws
which affected the whites were written'
(Tui Bua, giving evidence before the L.C.C.
in the year 1878)

The driving force of the nineteenth century European in the Pacific Islands was economic expansion of an aggressive nature. The islands presented themselves to the intrepid merchant and missionary as untapped sources of raw materials, and markets for their secular and spiritual wares. David Wilkinson first became caught up in but later came to shape and influence the direction of European expansion in the Fiji Islands.

Initially, Wilkinson accepted the ideology of the trader - planter group of which he was a member, but as his experience and knowledge of the Fijians grew he recognised that he could benefit personally by adopting and adapting the Fijian and his interest in native affairs began with his partnership with Tui Bua and continued in an official capacity under the colonial government.

When Wilkinson arrived in Fiji the Europeans were involved in two major activities; religion and commerce.¹ The two groups of Europeans viewed the activities of each other with mutual hostility and suspicion. Guns and grog were not seen as compatible with God and Salvation. The missionaries

¹See Derrick, A HISTORY OF FIJI, Suva, (1950).

attempts to keep the islanders in a state of pristine purity, unsullied by European materialism and decadence hampered the activities of the traders and planters. As the number of resident Europeans increased, the establishment of government became an issue. Two distinct and conflicting views emerged, the gulf between them growing wider with time and adversity.²

The missionaries and older settlers, many of whom were ex-beachcombers generally supported the establishment of a government based on the traditional chiefly system. The government they envisaged would draw its authority from the traditional Fijian system. The chief would rule with the aid of European advisors and the traditional practices would be expanded to cover new conditions and European needs.³

The traders, planters and the late arrivals generally opposed the concept of islanders holding power in government except nominally in a puppet regime. This group was largely comprised of settlers from the Australian and New Zealand colonies who had moved on hoping to make their fortune. They sought to impose a form of government independent of the Fijians, claiming the authority to rule for themselves from the

² *ibid.*

³ See J.M.R. Young, Chap 8, FRONTIER SOCIETY IN FIJI, unpublished PhD thesis, Adelaide, 1964 - for a detailed discussion of settlers attitudes towards government.

Whig principle of the rights of the individual landowner and a conviction of white supremacy. They rejected the authority of the chief and native custom as outmoded, feudal and retrograde.

Wilkinson came to Fiji as an agent and representative of economic and social change. At the end of his career he was a staunch supporter of tradition. His early experiences in Fiji produced Wilkinson's radical change of opinion and resulted in his becoming an acknowledged expert of the Fijian language, people and culture. The early governors were prepared to allow themselves to be guided by Wilkinson's expertise and placed him in influential and decision making positions. To understand Wilkinson's policies and the degree of influence he held in the colony it is necessary to examine Wilkinson's early career and ideology.

In May of 1861 'after an uncomfortable passage of twenty-one days',⁴ Wilkinson arrived in Levuka then the principal port and European settlement of Fiji. The purpose of his visit was to report on the commercial possibilities of the island of Kioa, for the Fijian Company of Adelaide.⁵ William Owen, M.P., and Merchant had gained possession of the island in 1853 from Tui Cakau

⁴Wilkinson, p5, PROSPECTUS.

⁵Apart from the PROSPECTUS there are no records pertaining to the Fijian Company. The records of the Registrar of Companies, Adelaide begins in 1865. Prior to this no laws regarding the registration of companies existed in South Australia. The Company was a private venture of William Owen and collapsed from lack of support in 1863.

as the price of a passage to Bau for the chief, his entourage and 200 tons of property and produce.⁶

During his brief stopover at Levuka, Wilkinson became acquainted with William Pritchard, the British Consul. Wilkinson relates,

"he was very communicative especially upon fijian matters. We had much conversation together, which embraced the past, present and future of Fiji".⁷

Wilkinson's early interviews with Pritchard provided him with alternative avenues of thought and behaviour to those typical of the planter class. Pritchard's experience and success made his opinions worthy of respect. Although Wilkinson's early activities do not appear to have been influenced by Pritchard's dictums as his knowledge of the Fijian situation deepened, his views veered towards those of Pritchard. Wilkinson's interviews with Pritchard mark the beginning of Wilkinson's education in Fiji.

Pritchard was born and raised in Tahiti, the son of a Wesleyan missionary. Pritchard was a staunch supporter of native sovereignty and land rights. During his term as Consul, (1851 - 1863) he instituted measures to control and regulate land sales.⁸ In cases where sales appeared unfair or invalid, Pritchard

⁶Derrick, p107, op cit.

⁷Wilkinson, p7, PROSPECTUS, op cit.

⁸Derrick, p143, op cit.

refused to register them and returned the land to the natives. Pritchard believed it necessary for Europeans to co-operate with the natives in their business and political activities. He realised that to reject their involvement would be dangerous in view of their numerical superiority and warrior temperament. Pritchard had, in an attempt to extend his belief in co-operative rule gained the signatures of the major chiefs to a document offering Cession to Britain in 1859. The offer and Pritchard's political activities were rejected.⁹ Aggitation from settlers who were alarmed by Pritchard's alignment with native interests resulted ultimately in his dismissal from office on the grounds of exceeding his authority.

On his return to Adelaide in September, Wilkinson presented a favourable report, on the suitability of the island for stock breeding, planting and trade. He emphasised the financial success to be made in Fiji, claiming, "the prices obtained by the present trader are enormous, varying from 150 - 300%".¹⁰ Wilkinson received the appointment of resident manager to the now renamed Fiji Stock and Trading Company, and returned to Kioa with his family and an assistant.

⁹ibid.

¹⁰Wilkinson, p10, PROSPECTUS, op cit.

Wilkinson arrived before the 'Fiji Rush' and not as an individual fortune seeker but as a company employee. His position suggests that like many of the 'rush' settlers, Wilkinson's quest for riches in previous colonies had not proved successful. As company manager his position was analagous to that of the later European plantation-manager, unable to afford to purchase land for a plantation of their own. Wilkinson's attitude towards Fiji and the Fijians was at this period not unsurprisingly typical of that held by the 'rush' settlers. White supremacy and a total disregard for native rights typifies this view. Britton sums up the attitude of the 'rush' settler,

"Surrounded by his labourers, foreign of fijian the planter is a patriarch, with power of life and death over his people and subject to no law".¹¹

Discussing the Fijians in his REPORT, Wilkinson writes, "in their present condition (they) may be regarded as overgrown children".¹² Wilkinson's examination of the Fijians epitomised the white supremacist standpoint as it was conducted with a view to determining their new role as the servant class of the whites. Wilkinson believed they would fill their role admirably, he wrote,

"many of them are industrious in their own way...The

¹¹ Britton, p14, FIJI IN 1870, Melbourne (1870).

¹² Wilkinson, p12, PROSPECTUS, op cit.

only difficult question I see is how their industry can be systemetised and turned into proper channels under European direction".¹³

Wilkinson provided a solution to the problem of native labour, in the shape of a grandiose scheme, whereby he would,

"first of all take possession of them, the whole tribe, men, women and children, and provide them with every necessity, such as food, clothing, houses...and gradually introduce proper discipline among them. I would provide their food entirely without their interference and feed them at one common table. The punishment for repeated disobedience would be banishment from the island, and this to a native is one of the greatest he can be subject to".¹⁴

Despite his elaborate plans Wilkinson resigned from his position as manager after a years residence. The explanation Wilkinson gave for his action was that, "the character and operations of the company entirely changed from the original intentions".¹⁵ The Reverend James Calvert, a Wesleyan missionary, remarked that Kioa was,

"no doubt admirably adapted for the growth of cotton, coffee and cocoa-nut oil.....but as for fitness for sheep and cattle - the idea is absurd".¹⁶

The company was financially unsound, it was unable to gain sufficient funds from its base in Adelaide. South Australia was a young and not wealthy colony. Like many settlers after him, Wilkinson discovered that without sufficient capital, schemes and ventures were

¹³ibid

¹⁴ibid

¹⁵STAR OF THE PACIFIC, Christmas issue, 1906.

¹⁶D. Scarr, p40, THE MAJESTY OF COLOUR, Vol. I. A.N.U. Press, 1975.

subject to collapse.

Wilkinson's resignation from the company was not due to the financial difficulties of the company alone, but, was partially due to a change of attitude by Wilkinson. His attitude towards the Fijians had never been so disparaging as that of a great number of Europeans, nor was it so firmly entrenched. Wilkinson rejected, for example the common European assertion that the Fijians were lazy and inept employees.¹⁷ In his opinion this was merely a symptom of poor management.¹⁸ Wilkinson's attitude shows a degree of perception and analytical ability which was lacking in most of his contemporaries, who did not trace the cause of any failure beyond the natives.

It is probable that by 1863, when Wilkinson resigned, his attitude to the policy of the company, rather than its aims, had undergone a reversal. His subsequent actions indicate that he no longer wished to be the instrument of the company's system of exploitation. That year, Wilkinson and his family moved the Eua, then an independent kingdom ruled by Tui Eua. One of his first acts in association with the chief was to draw up land laws protecting the rights of the Fijians.

¹⁷Wilkinson, p12, PROSPECTUS, op cit.

¹⁸ibid.

He became business partner and secretary-advisor to the chief.

Vakawaletabua, Tui Bua was a progressive young Christian chief of Tongan extraction on his mother's side.¹⁹ In the power struggle that grew out of the rivalry between Cakobau and Ma'afu, Tui Bua sided with the Tongan Ma'afu.²⁰ Tui Bua admired the effective Tongan system of government. Both he and Ma'afu recognised that land legislation was an effective way of coping with the changes brought by European contact.

The impetus of European activities caused the Fijians to suffer a temporary loss of confidence in their own society. During this period, island culture was at its most vulnerable. Most chiefs recognised the necessity of making concessions to the Europeans. The establishment of chiefly governments provided a temporary solution. In order to better understand and cope with European demands chiefs sought the services of European 'secretaries'. The secretary, who filled the gap left by the demise of the beach-comber, was a transcultural individual acting as interpreter, advisor and aide. Unlike the beachcomber, the secretary

¹⁹D. Scarr, p109, 'Cakobau and Ma'afu' in PACIFIC ISLANDS PORTRAITS, A.N.U.P. (1970).

²⁰ibid.

retained his respectability in the eyes of fellow Europeans. The secretary was seen not only as the servant of a native chief, but also as his guide on the path towards civilization, that is, civilization in the accepted nineteenth century sense, adopting and conforming to European customs, legal codes and political order. As such, the secretary served the interests of the Europeans as well as the chiefs.

Wilkinson accepted the position of secretary-advisor to Tui Bua in 1865 and set about formalising the Bua government, the foundation for which had already been established by Tui Bua. The chief recalled,

"We had an assembly and consulted amongst ourselves what was to be done and laws made. When Mr. Wilkinson came the laws which effected the whites were written".²¹

The practice of consultation and deliberation referred to by Tui Bua was an integral part of the traditional Fijian political process. As paramount chief of the Bua district, Tui Bua ruled a confederation of tribes in the district, including Solevu and Wainunu people, as well as areas in the Yasavu group which had been subjugated by force. Roth describes this form of political organisation as 'general' and explains that,

"While many federations had united as a temporary

²¹Land Claims Commission, 17-5-1868, M/F roll 6.

measure for purposes of mutual defense in war... they remained so, with a senior chief elected and ceremonially installed as their permanent leader."²²

Wilkinson's task was to formalise the traditional system and make provision for whites under their jurisdiction. He had to provide a form of effective government based on traditional lines which was acceptable to both Fijians and whites.

The 'Assembly of the State of Bua' was officially founded in 1865. It adopted European refinements, such as a written legal code and a system of courts.²³ This was however only a compromise with the Europeans. Wilkinson admitted that,

"There was never really any constitution of the Assembly...The chief could make and pass a bill by himself without their consent, as he was an absolute chief."²⁴

Most Europeans were prepared to accept Tui Bua's absolutism provided he could effectively enforce their rights and safety. The government set up by Ma'afu and Swanston in Lau was similar to that of Bau both being based on the successful government established in Tonga by Shirley Baker. In contrast the early Bau government established by At John^{5r}, was founded by and for the Europeans alone. It was not acceptable to the Fijians and failed to provided the security demanded by settlers

²²G.K. Roth, p66, THE FIJIAN WAY OF LIFE, O.U.P. (1973).

²³Land Claims Commission, 18-5-1878, M/F roll 6.

²⁴ibid.

which the Lau and Bua governments provided.

Besides being Tui Bua's secretary, Wilkinson was also his business partner. Working in co-operation with the Chief, Wilkinson was following the integrative form of settlement favoured by Pritchard, as opposed to the racist system of exploitation. Wilkinson and Tui Bua mixed business with politics for their personal benefit, Wilkinson found exploitation of the people via the chiefly system permissible. The laws he instituted in Bua with regard to land were contrary to the Pritchard 'orthodox view' of the inalienable rights to land that he came to champion under Colonial rule. Pritchard had stated that,

"Every inch of land in Fiji has an owner, every parcel and tract has a name...proprietorship rests in families...from this complicated tenure it is clear alienation of land can only be made valid by the collective act of the whole tribe in the person of the ruling chief and heads of families".²⁵

The Bua land laws classified land in four categories: occupied lands, lands under cultivation, reserves and waste lands.²⁶ Waste lands, that is land without owners, were declared to belong to the Bua government and were made available for lease and sale to Europeans. The rebellion law of 1866 entitled Tui Bua to seize the land of rebellious tribes and to

²⁵ Pritchard cited in Britton, p20, op cit.

²⁶ See Bua Land Laws in Land Claims Commission, 17-5-1878, M/F roll 6.

remove them permanently from their lands.²⁷ The chief made use of this law to extricate himself and Wilkinson from the financial embarrassment on at least two occasions.²⁸ In payment for sheep valued at £750 from Swanston and £870 from the Hennings, land from rebellious tribes was exchanged.²⁹ The stock had been purchased by Wilkinson's company, which consisted of himself, Tui Bua and Dr. Clarkson, later Minister of Finance in the Cakobau government.

The extent of Wilkinson's financial dependence on the Chief explains his appreciation of the Fijians and their culture. Wilkinson did not have the capital to purchase land and provide labour and stock, Tui Bua provided the supply of labour in exchange for a share of the profits from the estate.³⁰ Some land was given to Wilkinson in payment for his services as secretary to the Tui Bua. Having benefited personally from the traditional Fijian system Wilkinson accepted it as equally valid to his own, and worthy of preservation. In 1905 he strongly objected to the description of the Fijians as 'naked savages' protesting,

"they have a claim to a much higher appellation than that status gives them, among civilised people."³¹

Besides his business and political relationship

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Land Claims Commission, 464 & 472, M/F roll 2.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Stanmore, pp291-2, vol 3, FIJI: RECORDS OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIFE, 1875 - 1880, Edinburgh (1897)

³¹ Wilkinson, p17, 'Origin of the Fijian Race', TRANSACTIONS OF THE FIJIAN SOCIETY, 5-12-1908.

with Tui Bua, Wilkinson maintained close ties with the British Consulate. Consul Jones', attempts to maintain peace in the Islands were restricted by his limited authority. Britain was reluctant to invest her Consul with wider powers which, if challenged would require expensive military support. Jones attempted to overcome these problems of power and peace by establishing a confederation of native chiefs. The confederacy which was established at a Levuka meeting in 1865, had an annual assembly and codified laws which were to be enforced by and at the expense of the local chiefs, was the first step taken in the direction of indirect rule.

Jones selected Wilkinson to assist him in establishing the confederation and maintaining peace within it. As Jones was an admirer of both Ma'afu and Tui Bua's system of chiefly government, Wilkinson was an obvious choice for his assistant. He sent Wilkinson as his deputy,

"to high chiefs or districts where war was apprehended, and on some occasions where war was actually being waged to assemble the chiefs, deliver his message, read his letter, give council, receive their replies and furnish such information to the consul as it had been possible to gather".³³

Wilkinson's assistance to the Consul supplemented his work as Tui Bua's secretary. It was in the interest of

³²Derrick, p158, op cit.

³³Wilkinson, petition p5 to C.S.O. (1905).

Wilkinson and the Chief, who suffered losses of property and crops during the wars, to maintain the peace.

Wilkinson, for example had his home and store destroyed by fire which the Fiji Times "attributed to the rebels who are fighting Tui Bua".³⁴ It was not purely self interest which motivated Wilkinson to assist Consul Jones but also a concern for the welfare of the people. Wilkinson's peace-keeping missions often involved considerable risk and personal danger. Tui Bua recalled one such occasion when,

"Wilkinson wanted to go to Solevu on account of the letter, and went and got ashore, and the Solevu and Bau people ran out and took Wilkinson and his men and made them prisoners and knocked them about and the women came out and bit them."³⁵

Although Wilkinson's activities were often opportunistic and motivated by self-interest, as his career progressed, he came to be a proponent of native rights and culture. The cause Wilkinson championed was of benefit to the Fijians. Often the interests of the Fijian people were coincidental with those of Wilkinson and his policies were the result of a merging of self-interest and idealism. From whatever motives his policies developed their effect was to preserve for the Fijians an active role in the development of Fiji as a colony.

³⁴ FIJI TIMES, 13-8-1870.

³⁵ Land Claims Commission, 1798, M/F roll 8.

By 1865 Wilkinson had taken up a co-operative stance, believing that Europeans could and should work within the context of Fijian society. This meant that when the theoretical alternatives of 'republicanism' and co-operative government or 'monarchism' reached open conflict in the 'rush' period, Wilkinson's response was predictable.

Chapter Two:

Politics, Pre-Session Government and David Wilkinson.

'Some of us are standing by, who ought to be up
and doing'

(Wilkinson to Swanston, 4-3-1872)

Like Wilkinson, the 'rush' settlers arrived with very little capital and an overpowering belief in white supremacy. Wilkinson's initial opinion that the natives were 'overgrown children' was typical of a new arrival. By the time the 'rush' occurred, Wilkinson was an old hand and his attitude towards the Fijians had broadened with his knowledge of them. Familiarity with the Fijian in his own social setting, had bred in Wilkinson a respect and understanding which surmounted the notions of white supremacy he initially held. Wilkinson's experienced opinion of the Fijians was that,

"the practical system of domestic as well as political polity, which they evolved, together with their comprehensive system of inheritance and land tenure which has been developed, is, I think simply marvellous."¹

Although Wilkinson's reaction was more enthusiastic than was usual, his ability to judge the Fijians by their own standards was fairly typical of the 'pre-rush' settlers. Unlike Wilkinson and 'old hands', such as Swanston, Thurston and Clarkson, the later settlers could, and did, restrict their social relations to members of their own race, within the river valleys they settled, and when visiting the Levuka bars. This type of segregation was neither practical or

¹Wilkinson, p17, TRANS. FIJIAN SOC., op cit

possible at the time of Wilkinson's arrival, due to the small and thinly spread population of Europeans.² The experience, or lack of it, of working with Fijians explains the two attitudes towards government which developed during the rush period of the late 1860's, the co-operative 'monarchists' and the separatist 'republicans'.

Racialism was a major factor determining the distinction between the two groups of Europeans, but financial standing and economic interest were also important. Those settlers with pecuniary problems often blamed the Fijians for their situation. They retained their belief in their racial superiority intact in isolation at the expense of forging the amicable and co-operative relations with the Fijians which had contributed to the success of the 'old hands'. An alternative to the racist isolationist policy of many 'new chums' was provided by settlers who, like Wilkinson, solved their pecuniary problems by entering into partnership with Fijians. As a model, however, Wilkinson's establishment was not attractive as it necessitated accepting and adapting to the Fijian system and sharing the profits with the Fijian partners.³ A racist attitude provoked a hostile response from the

² See Derrick, p108, op cit. In 1861 the white population was 200, by 1866 it was 400. In 1870 it reached 2,000 and by 1871 was 2,500.

³ L.C.C., 459, 460, 461 - details of Wilkinson's financial arrangements.

Fijians which added to the difficulties.

Two distinct attitudes towards government emerged and the breach between them widened as the financial circumstances deteriorated with the collapse of the cotton boom.⁴ The diehard white supremacists and those inexperienced in Fijian matters, would not countenance any active participation in governments by the natives. The racists admitted to needing the natives' 'money contributions' but stressed,

"We don't require their talent, the white man will bring that...In all other respects the white man will rule; the power of education and civilisation must come to the front."⁵

The later settlers, living in the unstable outlying districts of Viti Levu wanted protection against the 'outrages' of the mountaineers. They also wanted land and labour made more easily obtainable. They sought a form of government which would serve solely the interests of the European community. During the elections for Cakobau's House of Representatives, Thurston remarked that the whites were attempting to get returned men whose only qualifications were 'a contempt for niggers' and whose policy was to 'clear them out'.⁶

The experienced settlers saw the need for

⁵ FIJI TIMES, 29-7-1871.

⁶ Derrick, p260, op cit.

a form of government which would involve and serve the interests of both races. Many of this group were more concerned with curbing the excessive behaviour of the Europeans than with furthering of their interests. The situation in Levuka by 1869 had reached such a low level that a resident remarked,

"...if broken heads, black eyes, and narrow escapes from a japanese disembowelling with a broadsword, or a few gentle peckings with a fourteen inch ham slicer, are not sufficient to make us all go about with revolvers in our belts...yet they make us all wish either for a magistrate that would be a terror to evildoers, or a beacon to sweep the beach of drink maddened ruffians."⁷

Whilst both groups of Europeans agreed on the need for some form of government their individual aims were in opposition. The racist 'republicans' took as their precedent the form of responsible government established in the colonies of Australasia. The experienced settlers favoured as a more suitable model the Kingdom of Hawaii, which involved both races in the government. The Tongan model, which retained political power and land ownership in the control of the natives was forwarded by the Tongan Ma'afu and with modifications by the Bua government. The Tongan model was the least favoured by the Europeans, although it had proved successful on a local level. It had been accepted by the Europeans who experienced the benefits that stable

⁷ FIJI TIMES, 11-9-1871.

government provided.

In Bua the government provided the security which Cakobau's European-imposed government was unable to achieve. The laws of the Bua government protected the welfare of both races. The land laws, for example, while ensuring security of tenure for the whites, simultaneously, protected the Fijians' rights to access and use of the rivers and foreshores of alienated lands.⁸ Denial of those rights in the Viti Levu river valley plantations often resulted in skirmishing, and, was to blame for the massacre of the Burns family and their labourers.

The Bua government was able to enforce its laws and punish lawbreakers. The Bua government formed by the Fijians themselves, with Wilkinson's assistance, did not pose a threat to Fijian sovereignty. The Fijians accepted the validity of its legal codes even in cases where the planter interests were favoured. In the case of the murder of a white trader, Maloney, the culprit, a Fijian, was tried and hanged.⁹ The Fijians approved the justice of the courts in Bua, because they imposed laws which the Fijians as well as Europeans had drawn up. For its capacity to enforce law and order

⁸L.C.C., acts of Bua government, M/F roll 6.

⁹D. Scarr, p93, op cit.

most Europeans approved of the Bua government. The racist, Fiji Weekly News and Planters Journal, praised it saying,

"Tui Bua stands pre-eminent among Fijian chiefs in his desire and persevering endeavours to introduce among his people law and order based on the forms of civilised countries."¹⁰

It is ironic that the Fiji Weekly News and Planters Journal, a racist publication admired the achievements of the Bua government, yet, failed to appreciate the significance of its success. Its success depended on co-operation and compromise between the races, to which they were strongly opposed.

The Bua government and its laws were not however unanimously acclaimed. The resident missionary the Reverend S.W. Brooks disapproved of the government. Brook's response to the Bua government echoed the general missionary response to governments. Scarr attributes their lack of enthusiasm to the fact that they,

"had already discovered that Fijians found a rival attraction in the government to the claims of Wesleyan Methodism."¹¹

Brooks used the incident of the Fijians hanging as an excuse for issuing a strong protest to the British Consul and Wesleyan Mission. Previously he had refused to pay taxes to the government and advised his flock to

¹⁰Cited in France, THE CHARTER OF THE LAND, O.U.P.

¹¹D. Scarr, p181, op cit.

follow his example.¹²

Settlers sharing Brook's dislike of a Native Government holding authority over them rejected the security Bua's government provided, claiming that,

"there is always an objection in having to pay taxes to Tui Bua, amounting to £1 per head for Europeans and the same for labourers."¹³

There were however whites prepared to pay for security of tenure and person. The Fiji Times noted that,

"Land at and near Bua is going up in value 15/- per acre has been offered and refused, 20/- being required."¹⁴

Settlers of this type and those who had played a role in the formation of the local governments such as, Wilkinson, Thurston and Swanston, initially did not support the imposed government which Cakobau accepted. Their later involvement reformed and altered the government to one representative of both races which they came to lead. The racists resented this and refused to accept its authority over them, calling for an independent republican government in its place.

Ma'afu's decision to join Cakobau's government prevented the possibility of the government collapsing due to lack of native co-operation. Cakobau summed up the situation saying,

"Ma'afu and I are now of one spirit and if you can

¹² ibid.

¹³ FIJI TIMES, 11-9-1870.

¹⁴ ibid.

be one with us it will be good for all."¹⁵
and predicted,

"if there be any difficulty in carrying out this constitution it will not be with us but with you white residents."¹⁶

The difficulties Cakobau warned of, emerged as the irreconcilable conceptions of the native and purpose of government, which split the European community. Whilst never doubting their right to coerce the natives and suppress their 'outrages' by force, The British Settlers Mutual Protection Society, composed mostly of 'rush' settlers, declared,

"We do not and will not recognise and countenance, in any degree whatever, the right of a few British Subjects forming the so-called Government of Fiji, to coerce their countrymen or any white man into obedience to their assumed authority."¹⁷

The antagonism towards the government from the 'rush' settlers was increased by the slump in cotton prices which brought their brief period of prosperity to an end. They blamed the Fijians for their problems in acquiring land and labour, which they saw as the cause of their failure. The government received a share of the blame for its failure to remedy the situation. In response to the British Settlers Mutual Protection Society's opposition, a group of planters, including Thurston, Wilkinson,

¹⁵ FIJI TIMES, 19-8-1871

¹⁶ ibid.

¹⁷ MANIFESTO OF B.S.M.P.S. in FIJI TIMES, 6-3-1872.

and the Hennings brothers held a meeting which declared,

"We pledge ourselves to support the government in the exercise of its lawful authority."¹⁸

Initially, these settlers did not participate in the government but the opposition of the 'Society' alarmed them. Racial conflict and the financial ruin of Fiji appeared imminent.

Wilkinson believed the situation was dangerous but retrievable, provided those with experience in co-operative government took an active part. He thought the experienced settlers had refused to play their part for too long, and consequently,

"We are drifting into political corruption and national ruin, nay, going headlong into it, and yet some of us are standing by who ought to be up and doing."¹⁹

Having participated in the formation of the Native Government at Bua, Wilkinson was a firm believer in the legitimacy of the Cakobau government. He was however disgusted with the members' abuse of their positions. Of this he wrote to Swanston,

"The government, the civil service, Royal Land Commission Courts altogether are a sink of iniquity, mercenary natives seem to be at the root of nearly all."²⁰

Wilkinson like many experienced settlers sought the influence of Swanston and Thurston in the government,

"You and Thurston would command respect both at

¹⁸ FIJI TIMES, 18-5-1872.

¹⁹ Wilkinson to Swanston, 4-3-1872, cited in Young, p415 op cit.

²⁰ ibid.

home and abroad, and soon set things to rights."²¹ he wrote to Swanston.

Besides summoning to perform their duty, Wilkinson was prepared to do his share. He accepted an appointment as Native Commissioner, deputising for Swanston, by performing the duties which would otherwise have kept Swanston away from Government headquarters.²² He was expected to oversee, on the spot, the interests of the natives throughout the entire group. Wilkinson, however, soon came into conflict with the administration, protesting at its lack of co-ordination. He complained that the technicalities of the English legal system hampered justice, as they only perplexed and annoyed the Chiefs.²³ He wrote to Hennings that the local magistrates who had of necessity to be local planters were,

"more likely to accede to the interests of their neighbours than to administer justice in an impartial way."²⁴

The general situation deteriorated despite the involvement in government by the 'old hands'. The possibility of racial war increased with the government's inability to prevent or punish such incidents as the murder of Spiers and Macintosh in 1871. Settlers in the outlying districts of Ba and Raki Raki decided to

²¹ *ibid.*

²² D. Routledge, p157, CAKOBANU GOVERNMENT, unpublished PhD thesis, A.N.U., (1967).

²³ *ibid.*, p174

²⁴ Wilkinson to Hennings, 23-3-1872, cited in Routledge, p124, *op cit.*

take matters into their own hands. The murder of the Burns family by 'mountaineers' triggered off a rebellion at Ba. This was led by the British Settlers Mutual Protection Society which now sought to overthrow the government and establish a 'republican' government. They believed it was necessary to take a hard line with the natives, failing to see that it was this attitude which provoked the natives to violence.

The old hands recognised that government on a power-sharing basis was the only kind possible for Fiji. They realised that the Fijian chief would not consent to surrender sovereignty or rights as the 'republicans' demanded. Cession to Britain, whose humanist principles would preserve the native rights and keep the 'republicans' under control, appeared a possible solution to Fiji's political crisis. Lacking funds and support the Cakobau government was foundering. The possibility of war was greater towards the end of 1873 than in the previous year when a correspondent of the Fiji Times warned,

"It is the general belief among those most conversant with the language and customs of the Fijians that a collision course..between the races would result in fearful reprisals..The mountaineers..would come down fearlessly and clear the coast of the hated papalangi".²⁵

²⁵FIJI TIMES, 13-5-1872.

Racial war was averted by the successful conclusion of the cession negotiations, to the satisfaction of both races. Wilkinson's experience in Fijian and European politics and government made him an ideal choice as interpreter and negotiator for Sir Hercules Robinson and the Cession Delegation. The delegation relied heavily on Wilkinson's diplomacy and knowledge of the local situation. Having been given a free hand Robinson allowed Wilkinson to guide the negotiations and within a broad framework, the details of Cession.

Chapter Three:

Government for both races, Idealism and Self-Interest.

'We don't want a man who understands our words but
one who understands us'

(Nemani, cited Knollys to Gordon, 8-5-1876)

It is a curious paradox that contemporary recognition of Wilkinson's importance to the colony; expressed by his wide sphere of influence, resulted in his historical obscurity. Wilkinson's role is, at the most, considered peripheral by historians. His capacity as floating advisor, whilst providing greater scope for influence, placed him outside of any particular department. Thus, Wilkinson does not figure largely in any of the departmental records. To historians gathering information from archives arranged departmentally, Wilkinson's political role does appear casual and peripheral. This, and the destruction of Wilkinson's papers and diaries in a fire at Bua in 1901¹, helps to explain historians lack of interest in him. From the fragmentary evidence of Wilkinson's contemporaries; planters, officials and governors, it may be argued that he played a major role in the shaping of policy in Fiji.

Wilkinson is a unique figure in the history of Fiji and in the development of its native policy. As chief interpreter he was a government official, but he used his influential position in the service of the Fijians as well as the colonial government. Wilkinson's uniqueness lay in his ability to relate to both European and Fijian cultures. His success in influencing Colonial policy in Fiji was a result of this ability.

Mastery of the Fijian language enabled Wilkinson to reach an understanding of the Fijian people and culture from within. His understanding was enhanced by his ten years of service and friendship with Tui Bua. The significance of Wilkinson's mastery of Fijian cannot be overemphasised.

¹B.L. Whorf, p 252. Language thought and reality Chapman & Hall 1956.

His knowledge of the people and culture was based entirely on his intimacy with the language. In 1860, there were no ethnographic works to guide him. His only source of information on Fijian society were the Fijians, who did not speak English. Wilkinson's ideology and his stand on Native policy, were determined by his understanding and appreciation of the people, which he gained from his knowledge of their language, involves assimilation of cultural norms and is closely interwoven with socialisation. Learning a foreign language involves the acquisition of new patterns of thought and perception. The Linguists Sapir and Whorf point out that,

"Every language is a vast pattern system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms or categories by which the personality not only communicates but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationships and phenomena, channels his reasoning and builds the house of his consciousness".

The understanding Wilkinson gained of the Fijian people enabled him to overcome the racist attitudes of his time. But linguistic skills alone cannot explain Wilkinson's empathy with the Fijians. Proficiency in Fijian did not automatically instil cultural comprehension. Wilkinson's friendship with and early financial dependance on the Tui Bua assisted him to overcome the strong prejudices of his own culture. Carew, whom Thurston described as a 'good Fijian scholar'² failed to reach Wilkinson's proficiency. He never gained the trust or affection the Fijians gave to Wilkinson because he retained, according to Thurston, 'strong prejudices'³. Carew, like many a planter with time on his hands, learnt Fijian with a view to its usefulness in dealing with the labouring class⁴.

² Stanmore, p 536 V3. Fiji: op cit.

³ ibid

⁴ Scarr p. 88 op cit.

Wilkinson's proficiency as an interpreter was due to more than his linguistic skills. He was a transcultural individual with a unique ability to translate meaningfully the culture as well as the language of the Europeans and Fijians to each other. It was for this ability as well as his sympathy with them that the Fijians valued Wilkinson. Captain Knollys wrote to Gordon how the Fijians explained their preference for Wilkinson as interpreter,

"We don't want a man who understands our words, but one who understands us".⁵

The Governors placed a high value on Wilkinson because of his relationship with the Fijians and knowledge of them. Des Voeux wrote

"Fortunately for me there was at the head of the Native Department Mr. David Wilkinson who had an intimate personal acquaintance with all the leading chiefs and an unequalled knowledge of the people with whom we had to deal. On several occasions he detected in reports passages which meant more than appeared on the surface, when it would have been dangerous to leave the matter referred to without immediate attention".⁶

Wilkinson, who was a deeply religious man, considered it his duty to assist the Governors of the new Colony, by extending to them his knowledge of the Fijians. Offering his services as interpreter to Sir Hercules Robinson he wrote,

"I have for years felt it a sacred duty to serve the true interests of Fiji".⁷

Although this may appear to be merely an exercise in diplomacy it may be accepted as a genuine expression of his feelings. He had been involved in the political events of Fiji since settling at Bua. His participation in the colonial government answered the call to duty which he had issued to Swanston in 1872, when he had written,

"to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not to him is it a sin"⁸

⁵ Stanmore, p 212 V1. Disturbances in Viti Levu 1876. Clark 1897

⁶ Des Voeux, p 357 V1. My Colonial Service. John Murray 1903

⁷ Wilkinson to Robinson 16/10/1874 in Fiji Correspondence of Sir H. Robinson. Emphasis by Wilkinson

By supporting Cession, Wilkinson was following the same ideals which had led him to assist in the formation of the Bua government and support the Thurston Ministry in the latter period of the Cakobau Government. Wilkinson supported the concept of power-sharing, with sovereignty derived from the established Chiefly authority, with legal provision for Europeans and assistance from them in the Government of the country. With the Cakobau government facing rebellion and bankruptcy Wilkinson saw Cession as the answer to Fiji's ills. He envisaged the colonial government working through the traditional system with some necessary modifications. His involvement at an official level enabled him to be active in the achievement of this end. Wilkinson's part in the establishment of the Bua Government shows him to have been capable of implementing practical policy based on his ideology. Wilkinson grasped the opportunity to shape Native policy under Gordon considering that by forwarding the interests of the Fijians he was performing his duty to God and the colony.

From the time of Sir Hercules Robinson's arrival in Fiji in September 1874, to treat for Cession, Wilkinson had a direct influence on the formulation of policy. Wilkinson's position as chief interpreter, originally conferred by Sir H. Robinson and confirmed by Sir A.H. Gordon, provided ample opportunity for him to influence subsequent Colonial policy. Both Robinson and Gordon arrived without any practical knowledge of the Fijian language and customs. Robinson was entirely dependant on the services of his interpreter for communication with the Fijians.

Although Robinson, as governor of New South Wales, was experienced in colonial government ideologically akin to that desired by the 'republicans' in Fiji; that is government based on and for the interests

of the land holding whites, the failure of this system in New Zealand and its aftermath in the Maori Wars, caused Britain to reappraise its colonial policy. In order to avoid misunderstanding between the races in Fiji, Robinson relied heavily on Wilkinson's knowledge and advice. The colonial office recognised that Europeans were often the instigators of racial conflict and warned that

"any difficulty of this kind (racial conflict) in fact, judging from experience in other colonies, to be looked for as much in misconduct of Europeans and labourers in their employment as in the aggressive disposition of the tribes".⁹

Problems of this nature had to be overcome before Cession could be accomplished. The doubts felt by the Fijians concerning Cession were encouraged by the 'republicans' who, used every opportunity

"to excite distrust in the minds of both Europeans and natives...the wildest reports were circulated; claiming all private lands were to be confiscated and Fiji was to become a penal settlement".¹⁰

Wilkinson was the ideal man to be chosen as Robinson's interpreter-assistant, as he was trusted by the parties concerned. Both the British Consul, E. Layard, and J.B. Thurston, then Premier of the Cakobau Government, had asked Wilkinson to act as interpreter for the Cession negotiations. This request was seconded by Cakobau and the Fijian chief, who trusted Wilkinson to protect their interests. Wilkinson recalled his message from Cakobau on that occasion as being,

"We are in great straits and difficulties and so perplexed that we scarce know what to do. We beg of you to come and help us for we have great confidence in you because you know us so well".¹¹

Wilkinson was Robinson's constant companion during the negotiations. Robinson believed that Wilkinson's advice and influence with the chiefs were a major factor in achieving the unconditional offer of Cession.

⁹Carnarvon to Gordon 4/3/75 in Henderson p 109. A Selection of Documents.

¹⁰Robinson to Carnarvon dispatch no. 2 p 2. Correspondence relating to Cession of Fiji 1874-5. Angus and Robinson 1935.

¹¹Wilkinson to Im Thurn, in Fiji Times, 3/7/1908 open letter

"His Excellency feels that a large part in the success of his mission is attributable to the well deserved confidence which all the native chiefs repose in your character and to the tact and judgement which you have brought to bear upon the negotiations".¹²

Accompanying the letter was an honorarium for £50. Robinson placed a high value on Wilkinson's advice and general knowledge of Fijian affairs. With a view to utilising Wilkinson's experience for the benefit of the new colony, Sir Hercules requested that Wilkinson,

"Communicate as opportunity might serve and to do so freely and in the fullest manner upon any subject affecting the colony",¹³

with the Acting Secretary for Fijian Affairs. The letters which Wilkinson wrote in response to this request were noted and forwarded to the Earl of Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, with government dispatches, for consideration. When he became Governor, Gordon continued the practice of forwarding Wilkinson's letters and papers to Carnarvon. It may be assumed that the Colonial office was interested in Wilkinson's opinions, and that these received his tacit approval.

Wilkinson's position was that of floating advisor to the government. Robinson explained to Layard, acting Governor on his departure from Fiji that,

"With a view of supplying you at all times with the services of a reliable interpreter, I have refrained from placing Mr. Wilkinson, the Chief Interpreter under any of the executive departments of the government. He will be attached to yourself personally, and when not required by you will be available in any branch of the service in which you may from time to time think it proper to employ him".¹⁴

¹²Hon. W.H. Hutchinson ADC to Governor & Sec. for Fijian Affairs to Wilkinson 15/10/74. in Fiji correspondence of Sir H. Robinson op cit.

¹³22/4/74 ibid.

¹⁴18/10/74 Robinson to Layard - ibid.

Wilkinson's advice was available to all government departments when it was required. Wilkinson was free to make suggestions on any topic or activity without transgressing any departmental boundaries. Had he been confined to one department his influence would have been restricted. That Robinson avoided restricting Wilkinson's influence indicates the value he placed on his knowledge and advice.

Wilkinson was an idealist. Having benefited personally as a result of co-operation with the Fijians he visualised Fiji as becoming a harmonious multi-racial community once the benefits of such a system were realised by the whites. With the conviction and zeal of a missionary, Wilkinson set about extending his knowledge of the Fijians to the white residents. He did not confine his activities to the official government channels of policy making, but extended his activities to include a course on Fijian at evening classes at the Leuka Mechanics School of Arts.¹⁵ His Fijian lessons probably contained as much theorising on Native issues as did his letters and which he confessed resulted in

"what is said of me here, that I have 'natives on the brain'".¹⁶

The course had to be abandoned due to lack of public interest¹⁷.

Whilst some white planters were prepared to learn Fijian for utilitarian purposes, the course Wilkinson offered apparently did not suit their purpose. The settlers who were firmly entrenched in their belief of white supremacy were not prepared to have their beliefs shaken.

Popular and scientific thought of the time supported their beliefs. Social Darwinism, forwarded by the early Anthropologists

¹⁵Fiji Times. 3/2/1875.

¹⁶Wilkinson 22/10/1874. Fiji Correspondence of Sir H. Robinson op cit.

¹⁷Fiji Times 3/2/1875. (the average attendance was eight)

predicted the extinction of inferior dark skinned races and their 'fossilized' cultures in the face of white superiority. Contrary to the popular opinions of the time and despite the high mortality rate among Fijians, Wilkinson refused to accept the extinction of the race as inevitable. To Gordon he wrote,

"then I always feel in reference to the preservation of the race that it is not to be done by any great, special, or extraordinary effort or act, but by leaving them to persue the course most natural to their own instincts and customs, and by reducing disease, which since the introduction of our own race, has greatly increased, and much of which is new and therefore beyond their knowledge or remedies".¹⁸

This is indicative of Wilkinson's insight into the native character. Compared to the official Investigation into the Decrease of the Native population¹⁹; which blamed harmful customs, lack of maternal care, poor sanitation and stressed the need to Westernise the Fijians, Wilkinson recognised these as merely symptoms of the root cause; the interruption of Fijian culture by Europeans and the introduction of European diseases against which the Fijians had no defence. Wilkinson's general policy stressed the necessity of preserving traditional practices. Explaining this to the assistant Colonial Secretary he wrote,

"We do not altogether understand or appreciate the almost stubborn tenacity with which they cling to their 'Vakaviti' or time immemorial usages for their daily life, and practically reject or misapply progressive measures, however well calculated to suite their condition or conserve their best interests".²⁰

Wilkinson opposed the call by Im Thurn and his supporters, to westernize the Fijians; to cast off outmoded and unhealthy customs, and to individualize landholding on a European pattern. Wilkinson wrote

¹⁸Stanmore p 523. V 2 Fiji : op cit.

¹⁹Report of the Commission to inquire into the decrease of native population 1893 Suva

²⁰Wilkinson to C.S.O. p 10 8/4/1892 - CSO 1358/1892.

"Surely there has been enough of experiment already with the races we have come in contact with throughout the world".²¹

Departures from the paternalistic native policy based on indirect rule which Wilkinson and Gordon had established were considered by him to be harmful.

"How very little effect for good has their intercourse with whites, whether official or otherwise had How little attempted inovasions have done to elevate, either the individual or the community, unless indeed such as have sprung from themselves, or has been assimilated into their habits and ways of living".²²

Wilkinson's strong conviction that the Fijian race could be preserved from extinction and that this could only be achieved by themselves from within their own cultural context and not by any imposed solution made him the major advocate of a protective colonialism.

²¹Wilkinson to C.S.O. p 46

²²ibid

Chapter Four:

Political Influence without prestige.

'It may probably be safely assumed that as regards the Deed of Cession and native affairs generally, he, (Gordon) really relied to a great deal on Mr. Wilkinson'

(Im Thurn to Legislative Assembly, 11-5-1908)

Historians have generally placed either blame or praise for the implementation of indirect rule and protectionist policies in Fiji, at the feet of Sir Arthur Gordon, the First Governor. Whilst Derryk Scarr¹ has levelled the balance somewhat by his examination of Sir J.B. Thurston's influence on the shaping of policy, Wilkinson's role has not been considered.

Many settlers who were opposed to the government's policies wrote their complaints to the local newspapers. They accused the Governors 'responsible advisors' of 'leading him astray'² and of these advisors, Wilkinson received a large portion of the criticism.³ Whilst newspaper articles, especially those by embittered planters, are in themselves an insufficient source from which to draw conclusions on the formulation of government policy, they supplement and illuminate official reports and papers.

Wilkinson was regarded by his contemporaries in much the same light as Thurston, that is, as one of the real villains of the piece, rather than Gordon. Although it may be argued that the colonists found it expedient to play down their hostility to the governors policies, by attributing them to his advisors, from the evidence of Wilkinson's opponents and officials, it appears more likely that they recognised and resented the influence his advisors had over policy. One colonist implied that the Governor was a tool in the hands of Thurston and Wilkinson,

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- ¹ D. Scarr. The Majesty of Colour. The Life of Sir John Bates Thurston.
Vol. 1. 'I the Very Bayonet'. A.N.U. Press 1975.
² W.F. Parr. p. 17 Extracts from Fiji Times and Argus. 1875-1880.
Levuka 1881.
³ *ibid.* most articles contain a direct reference to Wilkinson.

"I would like respectfully to call the Governor's recollection to the tale he told in his first speech about carrying the donkey and suggest to him that he has been placed in this position by the Colonial Secretary over the native tax scheme... and...the Chief Interpreter has hoisted his fool on the Governor's shoulders in the shape of lala...so long as he carries their donkey, so long will this Colony not forget that he is their Governor."⁴

It is not only the colonists who attributed Gordon's 'erroneous' policy to Wilkinson. Im Thurn, when attempting to reverse the Government's paternalism explained,

"It may probably be safely assumed that as regards the Deed of Cession and native affairs generally, he, (Gordon) really relied to a great extent on Mr. Wilkinson."⁵

In answer to Im Thurn's charge of being misled in native affairs and the land question by Wilkinson, Gordon stated,

"I have on some occasions differed from him and arrived at decisions contrary to his advice. But on almost every occasion that I have done so, I have subsequently had reason to perceive that he was right and I was wrong."⁶

Gordon was never a man to underestimate his personal abilities.⁷ As the younger son of the fourth Earl of Aberdeen, and a personal friend of Gladstone and the Earls of Selborne and Carnarvon, he had an aristocrat's assumption of superiority over those in his service. His self confidence made him impervious to the criticism and often advice of his staff. Wilkinson was however in an exceptional position. Although Gordon studied Fijian, he never mastered the language. It was five years before he felt competent to make a speech in Fijian and this was first translated from the English by Wilkinson.⁸

⁴ Fiji Times 12/10/1877

⁵ Im Thurn. Opening message to Legislative council reprinted in Fiji Times 11/5/1908.

⁶ Stanmore to Colonial Office 28/8/1908. reprinted in Fiji Times 6/1/1909.

⁷ J. Chapman. p. 224. The Career of A.H. Gordon First Lord Stanmore 1829-1912. Toronto University Press 1964.

⁸ France p. 104 op cit.

Gordon viewed himself as being 'at one with the natives,'⁹ to such an extent that he adopted their customs and habits on ceremonial occasions, but he remained dependant on Wilkinson for communication with them.

Gordon respected Wilkinson's superior knowledge of Fijian culture and was willing to accept his advice and guidance on native matters. Gordon continued Robinson's practice of forwarding letters and papers by Wilkinson to the Earl of Carnarvon for consideration, with Government dispatches. On one paper he added,

"It is by Mr. Wilkinson, a gentleman who is second to none, in his knowledge of the people and customs."¹⁰

Wilkinson's fellow planters, those who had been adherents of the 'republican' cause in the pre-session period, disagreed. They suggested that the Government seek the advice of

"Some who are even better acquainted with both sides of the question than the Chief Interpreter to the Governor"¹¹

Gordon preferred the advice of Wilkinson. He attributed the hostility of this planter group to their disappointment that the colonial government's sole concern was not,

"to raise them at once from indigence to prosperity that their claims to land would be allowed, that an abundant supply of labour would be found for them, and that their claims to supremacy over the natives would at once be acknowledged."¹²

Wilkinson's enemies considered him to be the perpetrator of Gordon's perverse native policy. Failing to persuade Gordon to accept the advice of more amenable individuals, they attempted to secure Wilkinson's removal from office,¹³ in the belief that native

⁹ France p. 113 op cit

¹⁰ Gordon to Carnarvon 10/9/1875 p. 10. Cession of Fiji V 2.

¹¹ Fiji Argus 10/8/1877

¹² Stanmore, pp 194, 195, V 1. Fiji op cit

¹³ Stanmore, pp 287-292, Vol. 3. Fiji op cit

policy would then be redirected in their favour. Gordon wrote to Carnarvon of an involved and costly plot to remove Wilkinson. He explained that Wilkinson was, like many settlers, in debt, his estate mortgaged for £3,000. These mortgages were acquired by men who strongly opposed government policy, and who,

"suddenly called upon Wilkinson to pay the debt, intimating that if he did not do so, they would foreclose, as by the terms of the mortgage they were entitled to do."¹⁴

They also refused Wilkinson time to correspond with England in order to raise the money but,

"intimated that if he resigned from office, ample time would be granted and the mortgages not pressed."¹⁵

Reluctant to lose Wilkinson's services, Gordon refused his resignation and temporarily stood guarantor for a bank loan until it was honoured by Wilkinson's English correspondent.¹⁶ Had Wilkinson not been of vital importance to policy making neither the plotters or Gordon would have involved themselves so deeply in Wilkinson's private affairs.

Wilkinson's influence on policy making was centred on native affairs around the three major areas of land, lala and labour. These were closely connected and policy in any of these areas affected the planters. William Parr, an opponent of the government and instigator of the abovementioned plot, published in 1881 a collection of newspaper cuttings¹⁷ for the purpose of proving that

"the existing opposition to his (Gordon's) native policy is not one of today's growth but that it has continued steadily to increase ever since the time allowed it for fair trial was considered to have elapsed".¹⁸

¹⁴ Stanmore, pp 287-292. Vol. 3. Fiji. op cit.

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ Parr - op cit

¹⁸ ibid - p. 1.

One of the most important but unpopular of the policies Wilkinson supported was the preservation of the custom of 'lala': a period of obligatory service to the chief. Roth describes it thus,

"lala...was one of the most important links between the chiefs and their people, and so served to maintain the cohesion of the social unit whether a large State or a small community. But while the chief had the right to command he was under a strict obligation to reward those commanded: the minimum reward was to feed them lavishly and it was the custom for him to present craft products to them as well."¹⁹

Lala was the keystone of Gordon's indirect rule. Explaining the system to Carnarvon, Gordon wrote,

"for many years to come, Fiji can only be governed as a British colony through the instrumentality of the native chiefs. The effect of abolishing these service tenures would therefore be to weaken the power of the only subordinate agency available at present for the good government of the country."²⁰

Wilkinson believed it was necessary for the preservation of the race to prevent interference with the traditional Fijian customs.²¹

Wilkinson's defence of 'lala' stressed that the custom was popularly desired among the Fijians, chiefs and commoners. In a lengthy paper on the subject, he wrote,

"The exercise of lala, is considered by the natives as right, proper, legitimate and honourable, to which the people readily respond and submit. This is so much so that whenever a trial has been made to do away with 'lala' as an institution, a greater difficulty has been experienced with the people than with the chiefs. The latter say 'If we receive less property, we shall simply have less to give away.'²²

¹⁹ Roth, p. 68. op cit

²⁰ Gordon to Carnarvon, p. 42, enclosure no. 3 in dispatch no. 10, Cession of Fiji V + VI

²¹ see above chapter 3, pp 10-11.

²² Wilkinson p 374 'lala of Fijian Service Tenures' in Anthropological Review. 1889

Wilkinson recognised 'lala' as being an important instrument in preserving the traditional patterns of communal obligation and social relationships. The tradition of mutual reciprocity, essential to lala, was a mainstay of Fijian cultural cohesion against the corrosive force of the European Wage labour system.

The labour and 'lala' issues were closely connected. The colonists who objected to 'lala,' did so ostensibly on the grounds that it was merely 'slavery systemetised'.²³ Their real concern was, however, as one protester aptly puts it,

"The colonists are in part prevented from having labour through this 'lala'".²⁴

The planters were not so concerned with the Fijian's right to be free from slavery as with their own right to cheap labour. They complained that 'lala' was responsible for

"diverting the supply of local labour in Fiji, from its natural course, into unprofitable channels."²⁵

where it was,

"hemmed in on either side by deserts of impractical theories."²⁶

The planters presented their own theories on the subject of labour.

They claimed the Fijians were addicted to indolence and that,

"every far seeing colonist must acknowledge that it will be beneficial to the country by teaching the Fijians to be industrious."²⁷

Wilkinson disagreed with this attitude and wrote to Gordon that such an attitude arose from self interest and complete disregard for the Fijians. He admitted that

23 Parr p 47 op cit

24 Parr p 23 op cit

25 ibid

26 ibid

27 Fiji Times 10/8/1877

"They may be improvident in many things from our point of view, but as a race I maintain they are industrious, ...but of course, in this as in many other respects they are not understood, neither does it suit the interests of those who cry them down and say 'they ought to be taught and compelled to work', to understand them otherwise than as so much bone and sinew to be turned to the best account for the white mans interest."²⁸

Wilkinson was a planter as well as a government official and like many planters had financial problems. His support of lala, which a large section of planter community believed to be against their interests was attributed to corruption and hypocrisy. Due to his partnership arrangement with the Tui Bua Wilkinson was free from the labour problems²⁹ which plagued his contemporaries. On a basis of shared responsibility and profits, Tui Bua was to supervise and provide the plantation labour. It was suggested that Wilkinson supported the 'lala' scheme so that Tui Bua could use his power of lala to obtain free, forced labour for their plantations. Opponents of Wilkinson's native policy expressed this opinion and warned Gordon that

"When any Roko Tui with unlimited powers of lala is permitted to keep a store, to trade, to cultivate to tabu, in partnership with another government official connected directly with the native affairs of the country, and with one who is supposed to be father of the present system of lala, and its supporter against the convictions of all the country, the government cannot complain if suspicion attaches itself to the honesty of the policy."³⁰

Although not mentioned by name, Wilkinson is identifiable as the 'official', from the description of the partnership and as the 'father' of the lala system. Wilkinson's critics were correct in assuming that his relationship with the chief influenced his opinion

²⁸ Wilkinson to Gordon 19/8/1877 in Stanmore p 560 Vol. 2, Fiji op cit

²⁹ see above chapter 1 p. 11

³⁰ Parr p 46 op cit

of 'lala'. No doubt Wilkinson would have been less willing to champion the cause of lala had his plantations suffered from a shortage of labour as the result. However, if the chief did use his power of lala to obtain workers; as Parr suggests, the nature of the lala relationship required the chief to distribute goods or food at the end of the service period, in thanks³¹. Hence goods for distribution came from the chiefs share of the plantation profits. While Wilkinson benefited from such an arrangement so too did the people of Bua engaged to work on the plantations. For whatever reasons Wilkinson supported 'lala,' and regardless of whether he benefited personally, the lala system was of real benefit to the Fijians. 'Lala' ensured that the native plantations would not be neglected in favour of those belonging to the wage paying whites.

The wage labour system was, at this time, a serious threat to the Fijians social and physical welfare. The young men were enticed from their villages to the white plantations. Village life was disrupted by the loss of its young men and village food gardens often neglected. The Council of Chiefs complained that,

"this going away of labour, is the root of the evil in some provinces, for it produces famine among the people of the land; the strong and able bodied men go to work, the weak, old men, women, boys and girls are left behind unprotected."³²

Had lala been abandoned, then famine like the contagious epidemics such as measles and influenza, would have contributed to native depopulation, loss of moral and social cohesion. Removed from the constraints of family and village the plantation workers would be influenced by European ideas and values.

³¹ see Wilkinson: 'lala' op cit

³² Council of Chiefs cited in Stanmore p 720. 'Native councils in Fiji' contemporary Review 1883. VXLIII.

The Government's policy of continuing 'lala,' and of providing an alternative source of labour for the whites prevented the Fijians from becoming merely a servant class. The use of the traditional system of authority for colonial administrative purposes: due to a shortage of funds, as much humanitarianism, provided the Fijians with a period of protected apprenticeship in government. This period of 'protection' enabled the Fijians to maintain their cultural identity whilst their experience in administration was to prove invaluable on their recovery of the political initiative in the mid twentieth century.

The preservation of culture or participation in government would have been meaningless had the Fijians been deprived of their land. Land ownership provided a base on which numerical, cultural and political recovery was possible. The present position of cultural and political dominance could not have been attained by the Fijians, had they been relegated to reserves, for example.

Wilkinson was deeply involved in the land question. He supported Gordon's aims of preserving lands not owned by Europeans for the Fijians rejecting the colonists claims for large scale land alienation. As well as being Native lands commissioner Wilkinson assisted the Council of Chiefs in establishing the now orthodox tradition of inalienable rights to land. Wilkinson, having translated the Deed of Cession, was inevitably drawn into the controversy surrounding the Fourth Clause, upon which Im Thurn based his attempt to individualise land ownership. The fourth clause states,

"That the absolute proprietorship of all lands, not shown to be now alienated, so as to have become bona fide the property of Europeans or other foreigners or now not in the actual use or occupation of some chief or tribe or not actually required for the probable future support and maintenance of some chief or tribe shall be and is hereby declared to be vested in Her said Majesty her heirs and successors."³³

Gordon chose to reject the obvious meaning of the clause,

"due to the conviction that the adoption of the course apparently suggested by it was altogether impractical and that had it been practicable it would have been both unjust and dangerous."³⁴

Having also given assurances to the chiefs on his arrival that 'nothing equitably theirs would be taken from them'³⁵, Gordon established a commission to enquire into native lands. The commission's purpose was to discover and register valid customary claims³².

As a Commissioner, Wilkinson conferred with the Council of Chiefs to establish the traditional land owning customs. After much delay and debate the Chiefs expressed a unanimous opinion

"The beginning and end of the matter is this: We repeat, and with one voice solemnly declare the true and real ownership of the land with us is vested in the mataqali alone, nor is it possible or lawful for any mataqali to alienate its land."³⁶

Wilkinson reiterated this view in a pamphlet written for the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880. His opinions on the land question had changed considerably from those he held in 1866. Then, as Tui Bua's secretary he had drawn up the Government of Bua's land laws which precluded 'inalienable rights' and mataqali ownership.

The Bua Land Acts describe four types of land; Occupied Lands, Land in cultivation, Reserves and Waste Lands.³⁷ The Waste Lands were the property of the Bua government and were to be leased or sold by the government. A further act concerning lands was the Rebellion Act, which provided Tui Bua with the right of confiscating the land of a rebellious tribe and permanently removing the inhabitants³⁸.

³⁴ Stanmore to C.O. 28/8/1908 op cit

³⁵ ibid

³⁶ Council of Chiefs p 77 1879-1880.

³⁷ see Acts of Bua Government in L.C.C. op cit

³⁸ ibid

The acts of the Bua government were partly motivated by the self interest of Tui Bua and Wilkinson. The Rebellion act, for example, enabled Wilkinson and the Chief to extricate themselves from a difficult financial situation. Finding themselves unable to pay Swanston on one occasion and the Hennings on another, for sheep they had purchased, they were able to settle the matter with land confiscated from rebellious tribes³⁹.

Gordon's land policy which Wilkinson came to support and as Commissioner helped to establish, was designed with the protection of the Fijians in mind. It drew its authority from custom, but the custom was provided as much by the Commissioners as by Fijian tradition. As commissioner, Wilkinson sought to ensure fair representation for the Fijians. He insisted on the Roko's presence, as the representative of the Fijians, at the sittings of the land commission. The colonists were incensed.

"Does the chief Interpreter think that the Commission cannot be trusted to watch over the interests of the Fijians? Let Sir Arthur Gordon save the Colony from his official's excessive zeal in the matter of land claims."⁴⁰

When recalled as Land Commissioner from retirement in 1894, Wilkinson's duty was to find some degree of order in the entanglement of claims and counterclaims which had resulted from the findings of the previous Commission. Depending on his knowledge of the people and customs, Wilkinson instituted a new approach to settling land claims. Whereas the previous Commissions had tackled the problem from a European angle, that is taking the disputed land as a starting point for their investigations, Wilkinson adopted a Fijian perspective.

³⁹ L.C.C. 464 & 472 op cit

⁴⁰ Parr p 141 op cit

As the mataqali were the property owners, Wilkinson first identified the various mataqalis in an area and then examined their claims to land⁴¹. Wilkinson's system helped to promote the concept of the indivisibility of the Fijian and his land which has remained the orthodox view

"a landless Fijian would be a contradiction in terms, a man of no consequence, without security. He speaks of his land as 'na gau vanua'. Not only 'my land' but, 'the land to which I belong', of which I am an integral part, 'the land which is part of me and feeds me'".⁴²

The Commission was abandoned after ten years, with its work uncompleted, by Im Thurn. He rejected Gordon's protectionist policy which appeared to have failed. The Fijian race continued to decrease and its extinction was expected. Im Thurn proposed to invigorate the race by providing the stimulus of competition, a factor which he considered had been lacking in Gordon and his successor's policy. The continuance of unhealthy customs and the unsuitability of the traditional system were blamed on Gordon's advisors. In order to individualize Fijian land holdings, to stimulate the Fijian economy, Im Thurn returned to the Deed of Cession and the 'fourth Clause'. Gordon's failure to act on the obvious meanings of the clause, Im Thurn attributed to 'one Mr. David Wilkinson', who 'misunderstood' and 'mistranslated' the Deed and subsequently 'misled' Gordon over land and native affairs generally.⁴³

In the 1920's, the racial recovery in which Wilkinson steadfastly continued to believe, was achieved by the Fijians⁴⁴. The period of

41 France p 141 op cit

42 G.B. Milner XXVII in Roth op cit

43 Im Thurn. Fiji Times 11/5/508

44 see Appendix

protection had lasted long enough for them to recover numerically and culturally. The effect of indirect rule had been to ensure the continued participation in the political affairs of their country. While Sir Arthur Gordon's policy was held by both administrators and contemporaries to have been a disaster, Wilkinson was a prominent target for their invective. Then, as the Fijians appeared to have survived the period of Western control, having retained dominance in, and gained independence for their country, Gordon's policy, largely the product of political expediency, enjoyed a retrospective respectability. Gordon's work was lauded as that of a far sighted visionary and humanist. As Wilkinson received the blame for his part authorship of Gordon's policy, when it was considered a failure, so, with its success should he now be accorded the credit which is his due.

Conclusion:

CONCLUSION

David Wilkinson remained politically active during the period between his second retirement (1905) and his death in 1910, despite recurrent diabetic illness. His real political influence however, ended with the appointment of Sir Everard Im Thurn as Colonial Governor in 1904.

Conditions in the colony had undergone dramatic change since Cession of the group in 1874. Wilkinson's skill as an interpreter and his knowledge of the culture and people of Fiji were no longer remarkable or unique. Younger men had grown up in the islands with bi-lingual skills and were capable of replacing Wilkinson in the linguistic field, whilst, ethnographic works, non-existent in the early days of Cession disseminated a knowledge of Fijian culture. Hence, the reason for Wilkinson's influence, the Governor's reliance on his knowledge of the people and as his channel of communication with them, had ceased to exist.

Wilkinson was aware that the reasons for his appointment and subsequent influence on policy-making were due to his knowledge of, and interest in, the Fijian people. He acknowledged that Gordon was,

"Much too practical and sagacious not to avail himself of the services of men found on the spot, who had personal knowledge and experience of native matters and who were in sympathy with the policy and system of government he sought to inaugurate."¹

¹Wilkinson, 'Land Tenure', FIJI TIMES, 13-3-09.

It appears that the dependence on Wilkinson by the first governors was of greater significance to them than Wilkinson's explanation implies. In his memoirs, Des Voeux wrote,

"I had the great advantage of the presence and assistance of Mr Wilkinson whose combined knowledge of, and sympathy with, the natives was unequalled and whom on this account I afterwards greatly missed. Owing to insufficiency of salary and the consequent necessity of giving attention to his private business he was obliged to resign office (1882). Indeed only by considerable personal sacrifice on the part of Sir Arthur Gordon had he been induced to retain office so long."²

Although Wilkinson held numerous official posts during his career; Native Commissioner, Native Lands Commissioner, these positions were subsumed in his position as Chief Interpreter - cum guide and mentor to the Governor on native issues. Wilkinson's proximity to the Governor enabled him to present plans and schemes which he supported, to an advantage.

The nature of Wilkinson's position and influence was not conducive to documentary substantiation. Apart from the area of native lands very little indication of Wilkinson's activities appears in departmental archives although evidence of contemporary recognition of his influence may be found in newspapers, diaries and letters. Neither was Wilkinson a career official. He often failed to capitalise on policy innovation. Dr. McGregor, later Governor of British Papua, amused by one such instance related to Gordon how Wilkinson,

"does not quite like to receive no credit for the

²Des Voeux, pp 45,46, Vol. 2, op cit.

details of the native work. His last grievance is that Thurston appropriated his Native Academy Scheme and Des Voeux first mentioned it to poor Wilkinson as 'that splendid idea of Thurston.'³

The instigation of protectionist policies such as the preservation of native custom, exemplified by 'lala' and opposition to the use of Fijians in the 'labour trade' was attributed to Wilkinson. So too was the responsibility for the initial government acceptance of the policy of Native Sovereignty over land and the participation of the Fijians in the administration of the colony.

To Im Thurn, Wilkinson was representative of outmoded and apparently unsuccessful official policy of the past. The concept of government protection for the Fijians, to which Wilkinson steadfastly adhered, was considered by Im Thurn to be erroneous in principle and practice. Whilst not disputing the aims of earlier administrators that is, the preservation of the Fijian race, Im Thurn disagreed with their methods. He believed it was necessary for the Fijians, who gave the appearance of continuing the trend to die out numerically and culturally, and for the financial wellbeing of the colony, to replace the stifling effects of government protection and ancient custom with a stimulating competitive and individualistic system. These policies were in direct conflict with those of Wilkinson.

Altruism was not the basis of Wilkinson's fostering of protectionist policies. A mixture of idealism and self-interest formed the base of Wilkinson's

³ Stanmore, p572, Vol. 3, op cit.

political views. With regard to 'native matters', Wilkinson's philosophy was a product of his early experience in Fiji, and his peculiar circumstances. His close involvement and continuous interaction with the Fijians, during a decade as resident secretary-advisor to Tui Bua, produced in Wilkinson an understanding and respect for them which was often absent among his fellow colonists. Wilkinson's experience convinced him of the fality of white supremacist notions and he regarded the Fijians to be equally as responsible as Europeans. The Fijian, he maintained,

"is a cheerful and consistant worker, and in all chiefs of independence the love for the welfare of their people is the stimulus for the diligence and efficiency,"⁴

As Tui Bua's business partner Wilkinson had forged economic links with the traditional Fijian political system. It was in Wilkinson's interest that the colonial government recognised and supported the traditional practices which he supported. The Fijians found Wilkinson's policies advantageous, regardless of the reasons he supported them. Im Thurn's attempts to individualise land ownership and development, along with the removal of 'outmoded customs' were rejected by the Fijian people. The policies had become firmly entrenched in Fijian culture.

In retrospect policies which Wilkinson championed are regarded as being largely responsible for the present favourable political position of the Fijians. Protection provided a period for cultural recovery during Fiji's most vulnerable phase, the time of rapid European colonisation.

⁴Robinson, Fiji Correspondence.

The concept of the inviolability of the Fijians' right of land ownership left a sound economic base in Fijian control, from which a successful recovery was launched and indeed, on which recovery depended. Government support of Fijian custom and opposition to the employment of Fijians on European plantations enforced preservation of the culture and kept communities in tact during a period when these were crumbling. Experience in administration and government provided a sound platform from which to stage a political recovery, the success of which may be judged from the fact that the Fijians are politically masters in their own land despite the numerical superiority of the Indian population. When Im Thurn instituted changes of policy, cultural recovery had already begun and the Fijians were able to resist unfavourable changes. Protection was no longer essential.

Although motivated as much by self-interest as idealism, Wilkinson's role in the development of colonial policy currently recognised as beneficial cannot be ignored. His conduct is equally demanding of recognition as that of Gordon. It is perhaps ironic that Im Thurn, Wilkinson's most severe critic, should have recognised Gordon's heavy reliance on Wilkinson's advice and guidance.

APPENDIX I

Figures from Norma McArthur tables 2 & 3: The population enumerated in successive censuses of Fiji.

Component Population	Fijian	European	Part-European
1879	108,924	-	-
1881	114,748	2,671	771
1891	105,800	2,036	1,076
1901	94,397	2,459	1,516
1911	87,096	3,707	2,401
1921	84,475	3,878	2,781
1936	97,651	4,028	4,574
1946	118,070	4,594	6,142
1956	148,134	6,402	7,810

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