Foundations of Public Leadership:

Accountable & Effective Political Governance

The 7th Centre for Democratic Institutions Pacific Parliamentary Forum

Fiji Islands, 5 – 9 December 2005
Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................. 3
Background ................................................................................................................................................. 3
The 7th Annual Pacific Parliamentary Forum ......................................................................................... 3
Public Leadership ....................................................................................................................................... 4

Session Theme 1: Parties, Policies and Public Leadership ........................................................................ 6
  From Opinion to Platform: Developing Party Platforms in Australia ................................................. 6
  Platform Development in the ALP ........................................................................................................ 7
  ALP National Conference ..................................................................................................................... 7
Public Opinion and Campaign Strategies ............................................................................................... 7
  Voter cynicism and consistency ........................................................................................................... 9
  Discussion ............................................................................................................................................. 9

Session Theme 2: Public Leadership in Parliament ............................................................................... 10
  Organizing Government Work in Coalitions ....................................................................................... 10
  Discussion ........................................................................................................................................... 12
  Engaging public sentiments through committee work ..................................................................... 13
  Benefits to parliament ......................................................................................................................... 13
  Obstacles and frustrations .................................................................................................................. 13
  Discussion ........................................................................................................................................... 14

Session Theme 3: Fostering Public Leaders ......................................................................................... 14
  Fostering new leaders ....................................................................................................................... 14
  Induction training ............................................................................................................................... 14
  Discussion ........................................................................................................................................... 15
  Regionalism and the Pacific Islands Forum ........................................................................................ 15

Session theme 4: Foundations of Public Leadership ............................................................................ 16
  Discussion ........................................................................................................................................... 16

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 17
Future PPFs ............................................................................................................................................... 17
7th CDI PPF Participants ......................................................................................................................... 18
Bio-Notes on PPF Presenters (in order of appearance) ....................................................................... 18
Introduction

This report provides an overview of the themes addressed in the 7th annual Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) Pacific Parliamentary Forum (PPF) in 2005, held at Shangri-la’s Fijian Resort, Yanuca Island, Fiji Islands. It includes a précis of the PPF’s history and charts avenues for CDI’s future engagements with Pacific Islands’ members of parliament.

The 7th CDI PPF provided a forum for select Pacific representatives to discuss public leadership with international colleagues in a practical, non-partisan and dynamic environment. Thematically, it addressed the leadership roles that MPs play, the choices they make and the actions and frameworks that allow them to pursue their respective and collective political agendas. In particular, it looked at the way that parties bring force to MPs’ convictions and the processes through which platforms are designed and campaigns fought. Further topics addressed were how policies are pursued in coalition governments and how up-and-coming leaders can be fostered.

Background

In previous years, the Pacific Parliamentary Retreat was designed to showcase parliamentary governance systems and designs in Australia and New Zealand, while targeting particular issues relevant to Pacific Islands Countries (PICs). Previous themes have been:

- 2004 Wellington, NZ Democracy and tradition
- 2003 Darwin, NT Parliament and land
- 2001, 2002 Brisbane, QLD Accountability & integrity
- 2000 Canberra, ACT Fragility of Westminster
- 1999 Canberra, ACT Westminster in post-colonial Pacific

Over this period, some 80 Pacific Islands parliamentarians from 9 countries took part in the activity, with 12 of this number being women.

For further information on these activities, including detailed reports, consult the CDI website at http://www.cdi.anu.edu.au/asia_pacific_region/asia_pacific_region_7thPPF_Dec05.htm

The 7th Annual Pacific Parliamentary Forum

In 2005, the forum used the theme of public leadership to analyse parliamentary work in relation to the roles that MPs play in political governance. Particular attention was paid to the activities of MPs as leaders, rather than on appropriate institutions or laws, although these also became major themes in discussions.
While high profile speakers were sought from the New Zealand parliament and Australian Federal and State political parties and parliaments, the activity was run in the Pacific Islands for the first time. Given the increase in size and budget, the activity required a larger resource team than in previous years, which included regional guest facilitators and speakers. To manage these demands effectively, CDI worked closely with CDI Consultative Council members, including the major Australian political parties (federal & state branches and divisions) and Federal Parliament in the planning of the 2005 PPF. Consistent with the shift in thematic focus, the Pacific Parliamentary Retreat was renamed the Pacific Parliamentary Forum, to reflect the need for ongoing dialogue among elected leaders in the Pacific on issues of mutual common concern. Further reflecting these changes, the forum was supported by and planned in collaboration with New Zealand’s International Aid & Development Agency (NZAID), the New Zealand Parliament and parliamentary parties, and the Parliament of the Fiji Islands. In kind, the University of the South Pacific’s Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance (PIAS-DG) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) also made contributions. In common with previous years, core funding for the project came from AusAID, the Australian Agency for International Development.

Despite requests for their selection, no women were nominated by their respective governments to participate in the PPF in 2005.

**Public Leadership**

The Pacific Parliamentary Forum was designed to foreground issues of common concern among Pacific Islands MPs and to generate constructive discussions about how to rectify problems, amend regulatory frameworks and/or strengthen existing, effective governance procedures relating to public leadership. The increased attention paid by international donors to issues of political governance in the Pacific Islands has generated considerable discussion about the origins and catalysts of state weakness, waning state legitimacy and the upsurge in interest in developing viable indigenous alternatives to Westminster style democracy. Furthermore, good public leadership and good governance are issues with which Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) have had to grapple over the past decade, especially with regard to the ways that good governance practices dovetail or conflict with local traditions and culture. Little productive attention has been paid to the roles and actions of elected members of parliament in the Pacific Islands.

One of the characteristics of Westminster parliamentary democracy, as it is experienced in the Pacific Islands, is its system of checks and balances based on oversight mechanisms that are, in large part, dependent on the principle of responsible leadership. Pacific Islands voters, like their counterparts in Australia choose their representatives to act in their interests. The understanding is that the MP will be equipped intellectually and morally to deal with the changing circumstances of public leadership. Hopefully, community interests will not become subservient to the personal agenda of the MP and certain checks and balances are placed on the representative to ensure this. Constitutional, statutory and judicial watchdogs have been set up to oversee MPs’ public behaviour. Most Pacific Island
Countries have provisions for an impartial judiciary to counterbalance Legislative and Executive powers.

Perhaps the most significant accountability mechanisms for the Pacific Islands are national elections, which are uniformly hotly contested, and which give people the chance to choose their preferred candidates. Political parties, which are integral to the operation of democratic political systems and play fundamental roles in promoting good governance, are characteristically weak in the Pacific Islands. They are often constituted by loose parliamentary associations, stitched together after elections, organised around particular powerful individuals and lacking in distinct ideological differences. Only in Fiji are political parties polarised by ideological differences, albeit also involving a high degree of ethnic division. Under these conditions, the means by which MPs make themselves appealing to voters has become a major source of contention, with personality, region, ethnicity and language group featuring prominently as the basis for electoral support. Commonly, Pacific Islands MPs are accused of pork barrelling and nepotism to bolster their hold on power. In the drive for elected office, making decisions in the common good often becomes secondary to the targeting of particular groups – particularly ethnic or kin groups - for electoral support. Where considerable pressures are brought to bear on MPs by particular constituents, powerful external actors or other established MPs, incentives are provided to circumvent the principles of good public leadership in favour of short term returns, personal aggrandisement or promises of promotion. Many MPs become direct conduits of services and goods to their constituents, despite the existence of legal frameworks and policies that promote development for the majority, rather than a select few. Across the region, MPs are derided in the media, public fora and by each other for their apparent failings in this regard.

A further effect of the lack of ideological differences between parties is that coalitions without coherent legislative or policy agendas, often form government. The lack of political parties differentiated by ideology removes the disincentive to cross the floor to join government. Political fragmentation means that rather than representing an alternative government, the opposition can look more like a collection of political “also-rans”. Consequently, governments have often changed in the Pacific Islands – particularly so in Melanesia - not at the ballot box but on the floor of parliament, through coalition changes, reshuffles and motions of no confidence. As Chief John Momis noted in his keynote address to the 7th CDI PPF: “It would be better if more coalitions were forged on principle rather than mere pragmatism.” Personality based politics has been shown in the Pacific to be unpredictable, expensive, founded commonly in a narrow set of interests, and most tellingly, has contributed to many of the governance problems that the Pacific Islands now face.

The behaviour of elected leaders has strong implications for the legitimacy and operation of any given political system. When MPs use public office as a means of self-aggrandisement they may risk prosecution for corruption. Where they privilege a select few over service to the whole community, they run the risk of electoral defeat. Where both tendencies are in evidence, public confidence in the system will in all likelihood be undermined. When public leaders themselves have no respect for the system, it becomes more likely that people will use means other than democratic
processes to achieve their aims. Recent history in Fiji has shown that when this occurs the possibility for violent conflict also rises. As Ratu Epeli Nailitikau cautioned in his welcoming speech to the 7th CDI PPF:

...one of the main challenges for our leaders today remains the need to promote amongst our people the principle of a respect for parliamentary democracy whereby opposition to an elected Government can only be carried out through normal democratic processes.

Drawing on his extensive experience as a military officer, Ratu Epeli reminded participants of the importance of leadership and the special obligation leaders have to set good examples for their followers. Officers, like parliamentarians, are leaders. Paraphrasing Field Marshal Slim, he reminded participating MPs that: "There are no bad regiments, there are only bad officers". The weaknesses a system exhibits can eventually be traced backed to the decisions that leaders have made. Chief John Momis framed these issues as a question for PPF participants to answer:

When simple rewards are given to MPs for their loyalty to senior MPs, the overall work of parliament is diminished. Governments appoint their yes-men to senior posts but what will be the result? They may win the battle but will they win the war? What do we want our Pacific Islands societies to look like? More importantly, as leaders, what are we prepared to do about it?

How MPs deal with these challenges will determine the development prospects of respective Pacific Islands countries. The laws MPs enact shape their constituents’ lives by providing the frameworks for economic growth, law and order and development. Where they fail to enact legal frameworks and where they involve themselves directly as sources of money and materials, MPs are likely to generate environments in which constituents look to them for service delivery before they look to state institutions. Now, as ever, public leadership is central to any discussion about good governance.

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Based on the themes introduced above, the presentations and the discussions that followed interrogated these key aspects of public leadership, and provided examples of how these challenges are answered in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

What follows are overviews of the major themes raised in the Pacific Parliamentary Forum, and the major points of the discussions that followed.

**Session Theme 1: Parties, Policies and Public Leadership**

**From Opinion to Platform: Developing Party Platforms in Australia**

Geoff Walsh spoke to participants on the ways that the Australian Labor Party (ALP) develops party platforms and the role that they play in defining Labor “principles” and “values.” From its origins in 19th Century trade unionism and social democracy, the ALP has strong traditions of Caucus solidarity and discipline. Despite being more federal than national in character, the National Conference of the ALP has
traditionally been its supreme decision-making body. During the leadership of Gough Whitlam in the 1970s, some of these rigid features started to break down. Changing social characteristics in 60s and 70s – mass communications, air travel, consumerism, and welfare state policies – further eroded this approach. Further changes came about with the increasing shift in Australian politics to the centre during the 90s.

**Platform Development in the ALP**

The process of developing party platforms in the ALP is extensive, complex and formal. Importantly, the process offers a chance for the party to draw in the various elements of expertise within the party based on the National Policy Committees. The process of developing the platforms allows for external “experts” and advocates to be drawn into the process. This allows for the effective management of complex policy issues and for issues to be raised, vetted and adopted or dispensed with. Platform development allows for a certain level of “kite-flying” and functions as a “clearing house” of ideas. In opposition, the process of platform development comprises a crucial component in the party’s attempts to differentiate itself from the Coalition government. Moreover, in Australia, where there has been no tradition of “think tanks” until recently, this aspect of platform development constituted a primary “ideas factory” of the party. It constitutes a valuable mechanism for community contact in a substantial and structured way for the ALP. Today within the ALP, the platform constitutes a framework within which policy is developed in detail.

**ALP National Conference**

These issues come together at the ALP national conference, which is held every three years and comprises 400 delegates. The national conference provides the opportunity for the leadership to showcase it platform and for members to articulate their ownership over the platform, become involved in debating major issues and discuss the relevance of the leadership’s vision. The need for informed debate allows for input in the direction of the party by rank-and-file members, resident experts and party leaders. Platform development represents and reinforces the internal democracy of the party.

**Public Opinion and Campaign Strategies**

Graham Jaeschke, the NSW State Director of the Liberal Party, addressed the issue of how his party develops its campaign strategies in line with public opinion, and the extent to which public opinion is allowed to guide campaign strategies. For a campaign to be successful issues generally have to fulfil (or offend) four important criteria. The four bases of a campaign strategy are:

1. **Salience** An issue needs to be on the public radar
2. **Personal relevance** It needs to have an immediate consequence
3. **Point of difference** It needs to leverage a party’s positive attributes
4. **Call to action** How to use the vote at the ballot box
Jaeschke suggested that there is a strong misconception in the media and the broader community about what motivates people to vote. According to Jaeschke, people do not generally vote simply on the basis of issues; they vote as much on the values and motivation of political parties in taking a particular position on an issue and the values communicated when politicians take a stand on an issue. For example, politicians might take a long-term view, being prepared to take a tough decision to avoid a greater problem later on. The values communicated and the motivation driving the defence of an issue influence the way people vote.

Like Walsh’s presentation, Jaeschke’s focused on the nature of Australian political parties as associations based on adherence to a set of basic principles. The most important thing that a political party can do is develop a firm set of beliefs that guide the policy making process. When politicians’ popularity and public image ebb, sets of principles serve important roles in defining and differentiating political parties.

Using the example of the 1998 Federal Election where the Liberal Party ran on the issue of Tax Reform (in particular the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax [GST]), Jaeschke demonstrated how an unpopular policy could become the centre of a political party’s campaign strategy. In 1993, the Liberal Party had attempted to introduce the GST and failed miserably. John Howard, aware that no other political party in the Western world had been successful in promoting an entirely new tax system during an election campaign, proceeded with the policy based on the belief that the GST was right for Australia: that is, it was in the “national interest”. The upshot of this strategy was that people knew precisely what John Howard and the Coalition stood for and what policies they would implement if re-elected. Liberal Party research had showed that the Australian electorate was looking for a leader with strong ideas about where to take Australia. People were worried about the Asian economic crisis and how it could affect them. They saw the Coalition as the better economic managers and in this context able to secure Australia’s economic future. The Liberal Party conducted exit polling to determine why people voted the way they voted and banked on the inability of their opponents to articulate a cogent platform. Liberal Party polling indicated that the primary reason for voting for the Coalition was GST/tax reform at 26%. Fewer Labor voters (23%) cited the GST/tax reform as the reason for voting for that Party. So GST/tax reform was a positive motivation for a significant number of voters – and a larger proportion of voters voted for the Coalition because of it than voted for Labor because of it.

Campaign strategies are fought on a set of simple positions. Both the Liberal and Labor Party try to position the election on their strengths. The Liberal Party has focused on economic management and national security – thus a theme previously was ‘Protect, Secure and Build a Stronger Australia’, whereas Labor has fought elections on service delivery – for example ‘Save Medicare’ has been a consistent campaign for years. Public opinion will continue to be a big driver of how politicians do things.

So, does that preclude parties from talking about something because it is not seen by the public to be one of their key issues? The answer is no, but only if it relates back to your central campaign theme. John Howard’s GST-selling strategy for example — given the apparent unpopularity of his proposed tax reforms — was centred on the
idea of the GST as an element of a wider nation building strategy, and as having strong implications for continued effective national economic management. Had it been sold to the electorate otherwise, i.e., with an emphasis on the detail of the tax itself and its implementation, it may well have failed to advance the Liberal Party’s aims at the Ballot Box.

**Voter cynicism and consistency**

There are many reasons why people get cynical. They might be better educated than in the past about political tactics, the media talk about politics more and therefore people are more educated. Politicians that act dishonourably, inconsistently, and corruptly can also add to the cynicism. The best way to avoid cynicism in the electorate is by acting consistently. By having a consistent set of themes and policies, the voters will know that you are not doing something just for a vote. Voters in Australia will punish you if you are not consistent. A consistent message in your campaign is also essential.

Public opinion is not set in concrete and it should not be the only factor in your decision making process. It does not mean that you have to be a populist in every thing you do, because that will probably make your look inconsistent. What you have to do is develop a clear, consistent set of beliefs and values to guide you in your policy process and your decision making process and then use issues to reinforce these themes.

The main thing an Opposition Party must try to achieve is the fostering and developing of a mood for change in the electorate. This will not happen during the campaign, it has to be developed over the whole electoral cycle with hard work. In addition, the Opposition must also demonstrate that they will do a better job. Where the opposition has been able to argue that if you were unhappy with the health system for example, then you could send a message to the Government to lift their game by voting for the Opposition. Hopefully, enough would do it to change the Government without attracting too much attention to this fact. This is a good example of developing a campaign strategy in spite of the prevailing public opinion that exists. Public opinion is an important driver of campaign strategies but should not be the sole driver. Your values and beliefs are as important as the actual issue itself. As the voter becomes more informed about politics, more informed about the tricks that are employed and hence is likely to be far more cynical about politics, then the more that politicians will need to get ‘back to basics’, namely hard work and a consistent position: standing for something and demonstrating values and beliefs in handling important issues.

**Discussion**

Except for Fiji, the majority of political parties in the Pacific are without the clearly defined left-right shift in politics found in Australia and New Zealand. Nonetheless, all the participants had experience in platform development, even if their policies are based more on regional or local factors, industry concerns, nationalism or service provision rather than overarching competing ideologies. Nonetheless, strengthening the process by which policies are developed was clearly an issue of much relevance.
to participants. The difficulty that arose in the context of these discussions was the prevailing belief that most local Pacific Islands voters are simply disinterested in overarching policies; they want immediate returns for their support, in the form of money, materials, employment opportunities and so on. Indeed, most participants suggested that this is what motors their political economies. The major upshot of the discussion was that these challenges are experienced throughout the world in both developed and emerging democracies. The major discussions focused on the need to reconcile the immediate demands of constituents (which are difficult, short-term and costly) with the long-term goals of providing frameworks to encourage growth, stability and a better living environment for the majority of people (which run the risk that principled politicians will be annihilated electorally because they fail to pay off dissident constituents sufficiently). Balancing these contending claims is not always an easy task, as the high numbers of MPs who are not re-elected in Pacific Islands contexts attest. Reconciling these tensions however was seen to be crucial to the long-term viability of Pacific Islands countries.

The role of the people in being able to choose their representatives became a major theme in the discussion. What constitutes an appropriate relationship between the constituency and the MP? How can the prevailing cultures be changed without MPs losing their seats? Is it better to maintain a relationship throughout the term of parliament or only before an election? The issue of instability drew the discussion back to the question of democratic institutions and the role of voters in determining the government. Systems with weak party structures reward MPs for crossing the floor with government status and other inducements. Where MPs cross the floor in parliament, they undermine the desires of the voters to choose the government. Participants could not decide on whether it was better to influence MPs against this kind of behaviour or attempt to ban it outright through the enactment of legislation, including constitutional reform.

Certain changes in behaviour were in evidence. In Solomon Islands, opposition MPs had organised themselves into shadow ministries, allowing them the critique government policies and actions more effectively. Although the coming elections would determine the success of this strategy, it was generally seen as a positive development. Certainly, among legislators, it appears that this made their actions more predictable and their policies more prospective.

**Session Theme 2: Public Leadership in Parliament**

**Organizing Government Work in Coalitions**

The Hon. Brian Donnelly, list MP for the New Zealand First Party, reflected on his experiences under the Multi-Member Preferential (MMP) System in New Zealand and the implications that a more fragmented parliament has on forging coalitions and organising government work in coalitions. In particular, he sought to answer the questions: “What makes coalitions work, and what allows policy to be implemented in coalition governments?”

Donnelly outlined the myriad reasons coalitions are able to function and the reasons that they fail. He began by recounting how despite a productive relationship
between himself and the Minister of Education (who was from another party) their two parties often diverged on major areas of policy, most noticeably in the field of health. Despite their signing a detailed document with clear parameters of policy development and expenditure, it was not enough to ensure that that government would survive - after 20 months it split. The work program was largely dictated by this agreement. The agreement had clear mechanisms of operation and set out a three-year financial plan.

The process by which the coalition split apart was extremely bloody and it almost killed off New Zealand First as a Party. In the end this was a separation desired by both parties. The government limped on to the 1999 election where it suffered inevitable defeat. In 1999 Labour romped into power but it still did not have an absolute majority. It was dependent upon the Alliance party with which it formed a minority government and on another minor party (the Greens) for confidence and supply. The agreement which Labour signed with the Alliance was weak and was nothing more than a “gentlemen’s agreement” to work together. The problem was that a considerable chunk of the Alliance was considerably to the Left of Labour and when Labour was dragged by electoral considerations more to the centre, the Alliance did not want to go there. Moreover, the Alliance was continuously being embarrassed by the fact that its ‘lighthouse policies’ such as free tertiary study were being ignored and tensions heightened. The straw that broke the camel’s back was Afghanistan. The Alliance as a party split apart and we had the weird phenomenon of a party, which had two leaders, one recognised by the speaker, the other elected by its members. The continuous embarrassment caused by this situation led to the Prime Minister (Helen Clark) calling an early election in 2002. Once again whilst Labour gained the lion’s share of the seats, it did not gain an absolute majority. As a result it had to come to some accommodation with a minor party to form government. In this case it was able to negotiate a confidence and supply agreement with United Future, which up until this election had been represented by only one member, its leader, Peter Dunne. United Future had unexpectedly gained 7 seats in the House and was able to provide the government with enough votes to survive confidence and supply agreements. The cost to the government was a surprisingly light one. Since Labour took office in 1999, we have essentially had minority governments. One might think that under these various different scenarios, governments would be hamstrung.

The reality has defied that belief. During the New Zealand First-National reign, and through the various coalition combinations since, record amounts of legislation have been passed. Advancing a legislative program requires some astute management to gain the numbers. The coalition leaders Helen Clark and Michael Cullen have handled matters very well. For example, during their first term in office they wanted to put forward legislation to introduce a moratorium with a sunset clause for applications for commercial release of genetically engineered products. Failing to secure the support of the Greens, they turned to New Zealand First. During the last Parliament, it was quite common that United Future did not support legislation. The government had both the Greens and New Zealand First to turn to for its numbers if required. In the coming years the Labour government will not run a crowded legislative program. The Labour administration has tended to use urgency
procedures to clear backlogged legislation.

The agreements that the government has signed with the minor parties may “hug the minor parties to death”. These confidence and supply agreement were signed on the understanding that Ministers will provide ongoing briefs on forthcoming legislation. By bringing minor parties on board with legislation, by providing them with a sense of partial ownership, it is hoped that there will be additional advocacy, outside of cabinet and cabinet committees, for the policies being pursued. However, these processes highlight the careful balancing act that coalition government requires. In 2002, Donnelly was asked to chair the Education and Science Select Committee in the New Zealand parliament, a post he had filled in the previous parliament. In 2002, New Zealand First was claiming to be a cross-bench party; however they were clearly in opposition to the government on key issues. One of his conditions of taking the chair was that the government could not have his vote. To mediate this, he operated on two principles. The first was that the government had the right to advance its legislative program as a result of the mandate it had received from the people. Frustrating the timely advance of that program for political reasons could not be justified. However, at the same time, select committees, as a part of parliament, have the responsibility to scrutinize the actions of the executive and the departments for which they are responsible. In New Zealand virtually all legislation goes to select committee for public submission. The Education and Science Select Committee literally ministered a number of the pieces of legislation put to us, cutting out significant chunks, changing others and in doing so improved the legislation immeasurably. At the same time, the committee had the role of rigorously grilling ministers and bureaucrats. It is the role of parliament and therefore committees to hold the government to account. Similarly, the committee pursued its responsibilities to review the Executive strongly – it released several strong reports, most noticeably on the implementation of our new secondary qualifications system, which led to major changes. The success of these arrangements depends very much on the personalities involved.

When we are talking of coalition governments, there is a variety of arrangements. The best way to advance government work will depend on the context. There is no one single formula, but there is no reason for a government to be paralysed because it is a coalition. Regardless of the arrangements, for things to work well, there has to be a great deal of goodwill. In the end, success or failure will depend on the quality of the relationships between the key players and no one has devised a magic recipe for perfect human relationships. It is a matter of playing it by ear and keeping sight of the goal.

Discussion

One of the difficulties in adopting ideological or principled bases for government coalitions was the weakness in party structures in office and the lack of interest in broad platforms. Continuing the themes raised in session 1, participants argued that in Pacific contexts personal connections with constituents were far more reliable in terms of electoral support than the furthering of national platforms or agendas. MPs may be elected on a party ticket but show no allegiance to their party when an offer
is made by the government to join them. In PNG in particular, an added layer of complexity is added when the role of the Speaker in determining party leadership in the house is considered. Indeed, given the Speaker’s role in recognising party leaders, several parties had become split between the faction recognised by the government and that recognised by party members. Many parties are split on either side of the House. Nonetheless, members agreed that disenchantment was growing among constituents in the Pacific and the results of unchecked fragmentation were damaging and expensive.

**Engaging public sentiments through committee work**

Picking up the theme of the ways that parliamentary institutions facilitate or hinder good public leadership, Hon. Krishna Datt, a long standing Fijian Labour Party member of the Fiji Parliament, provided an overview of the committee system in Fiji and the ways that it can serve to feed information into the parliamentary process.

Committees perform two major functions – scrutiny of the Executive and the vetting of legislation. They are capable of scrutinising virtually all areas of Executive performance. They may examine estimates of expenditure prepared by departments and other government agencies, review the finances of departments, and review the performance of departments. Through this scrutiny they contribute ideally to policy-making and accountability. They may also serve to vet every bill passing through parliament. The main aspect of the committee system is to hear submissions from the people, and based on their findings recommend amendments to bills. In this function, committees allow for the direct involvement of interested parties from civil society in lawmaking.

**Benefits to parliament**

The benefit of committees drawn from the diverse parties represented in Fiji’s parliament is their ability to transcend Fiji’s racial politics and partisanship and provide forums for constructive debate about national issues.

**Obstacles and frustrations**

Datt argued that Fiji’s committee system is still finding its feet. Several of Fiji’s committees show the development of clear consensus between political parties. Moreover, the government has tended to view committees as a hindrance, and committees have often been used to strangle ideas unpopular among government power brokers. Consequently, they are often given insufficient time and resources to acquit their responsibilities adequately. Moreover, given the apparent lack of awareness about committee work among the community, there is a need for better civic education. In the meantime, vested political interests give more than a little coaching to people presenting submissions. Nonetheless, committees offer unparalleled opportunities for the direct involvement of citizens, interest groups and the like, in government work. However, certain problems have also emerged in bipartisan discussions in committees, especially given their *ad verbatim* reporting. The more informal framework of *talanoa* discussions has proved to be a useful addition to consensus building.
Discussion

PPF participants agreed that elected, mandated, leaders were obliged to remain accountable to the people in some way, and committees provided such a vehicle. However, all too easily committee membership became a simple reward for political loyalty. Members reached the consensus position that committees should strive to be organs of parliament, not of the government or of particular parties, per se. Invariably in the pursuit of these lofty agendas, committee members often fall short.

Session Theme 3: Fostering Public Leaders

Fostering new leaders

The Hon. Taito Philip Field, a NZ Labour Party member, delivered an address on the fostering of new leaders. He argued that new leaders are fostered traditionally throughout much of the Pacific. Paraphrasing a Samoan maxim, he argued: “It takes a village to raise a child”. However, new forms were needed to bring young leaders into the ambit of democratic state institutions. Indeed, this is a major challenge for the Pacific Islands. One of the best means of encouraging young New Zealanders into the system was the organising of national youth Parliaments in the Pacific Islands. At a time when many New Zealanders were cynical about politicians, it served as a means of educating young people about the roles and functions of parliament, and encouraged many young New Zealanders to become involved politically. Statistics show that Pacific Islander and Maori communities are over represented in regard to drug use and crime in New Zealand. So a necessary strategy for fostering leadership in a general sense is to support improved educational frameworks. Too many people leave school without adequate education.

Political parties are particularly apt vehicles for encouraging young people to become involved. Through its Young Labour movement, the party seeded the next generation of Labour leaders. Moreover, these represented simple and subtle strategies for encouraging democracy. By exposing young people to established practices, introducing them to leaders and providing them platforms for personal development, parties encouraged political participation, a keystone of democracy. Fostering new leaders, therefore, is about creating cultures of participation and ownership. It provides a future for political parties. Moreover, it focuses people’s attention on long-term goals rather than the short-term gains of personality politics.

Induction training

The theme of fostering new leaders takes on particular significance when one considers the lack of basic support MPs get when they are first elected to parliament. Preparing new MPs for their roles in public life - outlining their responsibilities as lawmakers; overseers of the executive arm of government; and as representative of their constituents - is clearly necessary for the effective operation of any parliament. The high turnover of Pacific MPs means that many new members have little time to learn their roles. Although induction courses for MPs are becoming more frequent,
few secretariats have been able to provide adequate induction sessions in their own right for their members at the beginning of each Parliament, rather, such responsibilities usually fall to development projects. Members themselves often complain that they receive inadequate information about bills from either their own party executives or their respective parliamentary secretariats, suggesting that many MPs take their roles seriously but are unable to change the underlying structures, which govern parliamentary behaviour.

Discussion

The ensuing discussion focused on the need to inculcate emerging leaders with all the attributes of public office, not just the belief that they were already powerful and in control. Indeed, “half-baked” leaders were all too common in the Pacific Islands. Many “leaders” had no respect for the public, placed themselves before their constituency, and became rich in office. The panoply of financial scandals throughout the Pacific was testament to these events. According to Chief John Momis, a former Catholic priest, irrespective of whether MPs were Christian or not, one of the surest ways that they could gain support was doing something in the group interest: “the best form of prayer is doing something right and correct for others.”

The basic Westminster system was criticised because of its general inability in the Pacific to ensure representation of women and minority groups. One of the perennial problems of leadership in the Pacific Islands is the dearth of women in positions of power. Several members noted that this should be addressed as an explicit theme in future activities. Many participants suggested better voter and civic education and better education for girls and women generally. The under representation of women in parliament undermined the legitimacy of many parliaments, participants suggested, because large sections of the population remain unrepresented. Joses Sanga, MP for East Malaita and Chair of the Solomon Islands Foreign Affairs Committee, suggested open discussions should be held about the electoral systems of Pacific Islands Countries to encourage the better representation of women and other under-represented groups in national parliaments.

To arrest these trends, mechanisms such as those articulated by Hon. Taito Philip Field were worth exploring with the relevant organisations. In particular, the concept of a youth parliament and youth forum for the Pacific Islands were explored and supported. Moreover, members broadly supported the idea of better civic education programs to target local communities were needed.

Regionalism and the Pacific Islands Forum

A growing theme in the PPF is the need for ongoing regional cooperation on issues of mutual concern for Pacific Islands MPs. In addition to involvement in activities like the PPF, the participating MPs called for greater regional cooperation through the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). In a presentation made to the group by PIF Secretary General Greg Urwin and Regional Parliamentary Governance Advisor Mose Saitala, the participants were informed of the growing Pacific Plan. Many participants were unaware of the Pacific Plan but were supportive of attempts
to encourage greater involvement in regional activities through the PIF, especially in light of the Biketawa Declaration, which cleared the way for individual regional countries to view negative developments in other countries as regional concerns.

As part of this program of growing regionalism, Pacific Islands Countries were being encouraged to participate in regional parliamentary strengthening activities. Members encouraged CDI and the PIF to maintain their engagement with the region in future activities.

**Session theme 4: Foundations of Public Leadership**

Concluding the program of organised activities, the Hon. Bruce Billson, Australia’s Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs addressed participants on his own experiences of public leadership. Politics is about compromise, but it is also about making a difference. While various interests always need to be balanced, that is only a fraction of the overall task. In essence, MPs are in the trust game - they are involved in building public trust. People trust that MPs will be able to make their nation, their lives and their communities a better place. Commonly this becomes a very high expectation because those hopes change from week to week.

Billson reiterated the need for pragmatism in office but implored participants not to lose sight of the major goal, never to forget the big picture. When one’s political opponents focus on negative personal aspects of the member or make vexatious slurs against their opponents to undermine their legitimacy, it is important never to let the personal attacks detract from the overall importance of the work, nor to allow the member’s attention to be shifted from the governance tasks at hand. Public life requires MPs to be resilient.

**Discussion**

The concluding discussions focused on the management of the community’s expectations of their MPs. In particular, participants explored the personal and electoral implications of denying requests from constituents. As Bruce Billson stated, the systems that MPs decide on oftentimes impacts on the practices of MPs and the expectations of their constituents. MP constituency allowances offer a case in point. PNG MPs receive a constituency allowance many times greater than their Australian counterparts. However, they are also characterised as delivering that money directly to constituents, while simultaneously having great difficulty in effecting changes to the policy environment to encourage growth, improve education standards, and foster better law and order. The desire for more money to be paid directly to MPs can be seen as masking the inability of MPs to cultivate an effective policy environment. Rather than directly helping constituents, one of the ways Australian MPs manage direct requests for help is to put their constituents in contact with the relevant authorities. For example, if a constituent requests money to pay the rent because their wallet has been stolen, they should be directed to the police to make a report and an agency that can offer rental assistance. Offering money to constituents directly tends to encourage other people to make direct requests. No MP could possibly hope to give money to everyone in his or her electorate.
Conclusion

Discussions at the 7th CDI PPF highlighted the need for flexibility in governance questions. As one participant stated in discussion, the simplest way to destroy democracy is to ossify the system into preconceived structures, to limit people’s ability to respond to changing circumstances. Limiting the ability of everyday Pacific Islanders to criticise their leaders was neither democratic nor traditional. Pacific Island communities have always had the ability to influence the decisions of their traditional leaders. When democratic leaders attempt to crack down on dissenting voices, they simply entrench their own power. As another participant stated, fully-fledged leaders, whether traditional or democratic, are respectful of the people’s feelings and aspirations.

While the discussions noted above often focused on the need for better regulatory frameworks, participants agreed that the best means of improving public leadership in the Pacific Islands is for leaders themselves to take up the responsibility for making well-informed judgements in the collective interest. While candidates and members need to be aware of the tensions of public life, they can mediate them without losing office.

What is crucial to recognise is that political governance in both Westminster and ‘traditional’ systems is an ongoing process with no end. Despite the prevalence of money politics, the pull of region, ethnicity and family, and the intense localisation of issues, public leadership demands an eye for the national interest. As Chief John Momis stated, the failure to provide for future generations will determine how the current cohort of political leaders in the Pacific Islands are remembered.

Future PPFs

Similarly, the future of the PPF will depend on the flexibility and commitment of participating MPs. As participants stated, there is an ongoing need for knowledge exchange and political education programs for citizens and for MPs throughout the Pacific region. All the PPF participants called on CDI to maintain its engagement with the region, and to encourage ongoing dialogue on these important issues. The need for up-to-date and relevant information to be shared between Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands would be central to any future activities. Ensuring the effectiveness of the PPF beyond the actual seminar will be the key challenge for CDI planners in the coming years. A more formal network arising from the PPF is clearly beneficial and participants stated that they would like to remain involved in CDI activities.

If you would like to comment on the report or contribute further thoughts on public leadership please use the online form at www.cdi.anu.edu.au or send your thoughts to us by post at:

Centre for Democratic Institutions
Australian National University ACT 0200
AUSTRALIA
7th CDI PPF Participants

1. Hon Teinakore Tom Bishop, MP, Cook Islands
2. Mr Mapu Tangata Tutai Taia, MP, Cook Islands
3. Hon Niko Nawaikula MP, Fiji
4. Hon Mohammed Rafiq MP, Fiji
5. Hon Valdon Dowiyogo MP, Speaker of Parliament, Republic of Nauru
6. Hon Tofua Puletama MP, Niue
7. Hon Opili Talafasi MP, Niue
8. Hon Byron Chan, MP, PNG
9. Hon Ben Kiagi, MP, PNG
10. Mr Aiono Tile Gafa, MP, Samoa
11. Mr Leota-Su’atele Manusegi, MP, Samoa
12. Hon Jeffrey Teava, MP, Solomon Islands
13. Hon Joses Wawari Sanga, MP, Solomon Islands
14. Mr Sunia Fili MP, Tonga
15. Mr Viliami Kaufusi Helu MP, Tonga
16. Hon. Marcellino Pipite MP, Vanuatu

Bio-Notes on PPF Presenters (in order of appearance)

Michael Morgan is a consultant and academic who is currently the Deputy Director for the Centre for Democratic Institutions at the Australian National University. His current research interests are political culture, governance and representation in Melanesia, with a special interest in cabinet and coalition politics. Institutionally, his work focuses on parliaments and political parties. He has undertaken consultancies on politics and development policy in Melanesia for the Bonn-International Centre for Conversion (BICC), the United Nations Development Program Governance for Livelihoods and Development (UNDP-GOLD) Project and AusAID.

Ratu Epeli Nailatikau is the Na Turaga Mai Naisogolaca. Since 2001, he has served as Speaker of the Fijian House of Representatives and in this capacity is Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Orders Committee and of the House Committee. Prior to his entry into politics, Ratu Epeli spent 20 years in the military and 17 years in the diplomatic service. Following his education at Bau District School, Draiba Fijian School, Levuka Public School and Queen Victoria School, Ratu Epeli trained as a soldier in New Zealand. In 1966, he served on secondment in the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment and was posted to Sarawak, Malaysia, during Indonesia's "Konfrontasi" against Malaysia. He proved to be a popular and highly respected officer. When he returned to the Fiji Infantry Regiment, he rose steadily
through the ranks. By 1987, he held the rank of Brigadier-General, and was the Commander of the Royal Fiji Military Forces. In 1987, Ratu Epeli retired from the Army to pursue a career in the diplomatic service. After completing the Foreign Service Course at Oxford University in the United Kingdom, he was appointed High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and accredited as Fiji’s Ambassador to Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Israel and the Holy Sea. He was later appointed as Fiji’s Roving Ambassador and High Commissioner to the member states of the South Pacific Forum, before taking up a post as Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs and External Trade in 1999. He served in the Interim Government of 2000 as Minister for Fijian Affairs. After the General Election of 2001, he was elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau is the UNAIDS Special Representative for the Pacific.

John Lawrence Momis grew up in Morou Village, Buin, in South Bougainville. He received his secondary education in Australia. After training in Papua New Guinea and Australia, he was ordained a Catholic priest in Bougainville in 1970. He has been elected to the PNG National Parliament as a Bougainville representative seven times (1972-2002). From 1999 he was governor of Bougainville, a parliamentary position, but in April 2005 he resigned to contest the election for President of the first Autonomous Bougainville Government. He is married to Elizabeth Ibua Momis.

Professor Graham Hassall is Professor of Governance at the Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance (PIAS-DG), at the University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji Islands. He completed his undergraduate studies in history and in education at the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales, and his PhD in Pacific history at the Australian National University. From 1990 to 2000 he was director of the Asia Pacific Program at the Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies at the University of Melbourne. He has also taught in Papua New Guinea and Switzerland. He has been a consultant to the Papua New Guinea Constitutional Review Commission, United Nations Development Program, and the Pacific Islands Forum. His current research focuses on the major challenges of governance in the Pacific region. In 2005-06 these focus on governance for human development (participation in production of the 3rd Pacific Human Development Report); regional governance (development of the Pacific Islands Forum’s Pacific Plan); Health Governance; Pacific Constitutional systems and electoral systems; security aspects of governance (including conflict resolution practices in the region); prospects for e-Governance (including development of a regional governance knowledge portal), and aspects of political governance, including the relationship between governance and social integration.

Jeanette Bolenga is a former Acting Principal Electoral Officer (PEO) for Vanuatu. She is the inaugural Fellow in Electoral Studies at the PIAS-DG at USP in Suva, Fiji Islands.

Geoff Walsh AO has spent most of his career at the centre of politics and government. Until late 2003 he was National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party. Prior to that appointment he held senior positions in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. As well as a posting to Hong Kong as Australian Consul-General from 1995-8, he was Victorian State Director of the Department and First Assistant
Secretary, Public Affairs Division. Geoff was Prime Minister Keating’s Principal Private Secretary in 1994 and was Press Secretary (1983-6) and Political Adviser (1988-90) to Prime Minister Bob Hawke. In 1987-88 he worked in Geneva and developing countries for the International Labour Organisation, a UN agency. Geoff started his working life as a journalist with the Border Morning Mail, Herald-Sun, Age and Australian Financial Review. With extensive political, bureaucratic and business networks in Australia and the region, Geoff has highly developed skills in campaigning, communications strategies and project planning and delivery. Geoff has a BA and is a Victorian committee member of the Hong Kong Australia Business Association, a member of the La Trobe University Council and of the Advisory Council of the Centre for Democratic Institutions. He also writes on Australian politics for major Australian newspapers. In June 2005 Geoff was made an Officer in the Order of Australia (AO) for services to politics, tertiary education and promoting closer ties between Australia and Hong Kong.

**Graham Jaeschke** is currently the State Director of the Liberal Party (NSW) Division. He has held several senior posts in the party and has extensive knowledge and experience of campaign management at all levels of government in Australia. For four years (2001-2005) he was the State Director Liberal Party (South Australia) Division. Between 1999 and 2001, he was State Director Liberal Party (Queensland) Division.

**The Hon. Brian Donnelly** is a New Zealand First List Member of Parliament. His current parliamentary roles include being spokesperson on Education; ERO; Pacific Island Affairs; Science & Technology; CRIs; Arts & Culture; Sports (2002-) and Chairperson of the Education and Science Committee. His former Parliamentary Roles include being a member of the Executive of the New Zealand First - National coalition government (1996-1998), Minister for the Education Review Office; Associate Minister of Education with delegations for Early Childhood Education, Maori and Pacific Island Education, curriculum and assessment, training and transport. He later became Associate Minister of Pacific Island Affairs and served on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Select Committee in 1997 and Finance and Expenditure in 1998. He was re-elected as List MP in 1999 and member of the Education and Science Select Committee. Between 1999 and 2002 he was spokesperson on Education and Youth Affairs.

**The Hon. Krishna Datt** is the Fiji Labour Party member for the Macuata East Open Constituency. He is an alumnus of the Pacific Parliamentary Retreat.

**The Hon. Taito Phillip Field** is the Labour Member for Mangere, New Zealand. He describes himself as being a New Zealander of Samoan, Cook Island, English and Jewish descent. He was born and raised in Western Samoa and came to New Zealand at the age of seven. He is married with two children. Mr Field is currently a member of the Social Services Select Committee (1993-) and recently became a member of the Transport and Industrial Relations Committee (10 November 2005-). He has been the Labour Opposition Spokesperson on Pacific Island Affairs (1993-1999), was a member of the NZ Parliamentary Delegation to Vanuatu in 1994 and a member of the Pacific Bilateral Relations NZ Parliamentary Delegation with New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Don McKinnon, to Melanesia and Polynesia.
1994 and 1995. More recently he was Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Pacific Island Affairs, Minister of Justice and Minister for Social Services and Employment (15 August 2002-19 May 2003), Minister of State (19 May 2003-19 October 2005), Associate Minister of Pacific Island Affairs (19 May 2003-19 October 2005), Associate Minister of Justice (19 May 2003-19 October 2005) and Associate Minister of Social Development and Employment (19 May 2003-19 October 2005).

**Greg Urwin** began his first three-year term as Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in February 2004. The Secretariat is the administrative arm of the Pacific Islands Forum – the annual gathering of heads of the 16 independent and self-governing countries in the Pacific. Mr Urwin has a distinguished diplomatic and civil service background, which has focused on Australia and the Pacific Islands. Mr Urwin was the Australian High Commissioner in Samoa (1977–79); then took up the post of Samoa’s Secretary for Foreign Affairs (1979-1982). After leaving Samoa he returned to the Australian Foreign Service and was posted to Vanuatu (1985 – 88) and Fiji (1995-99) as High Commissioner. Mr Urwin is a specialist in Pacific Island affairs. He has been a member of regional missions to areas of conflict in the Pacific for the Australian Government, for the Pacific Islands Forum and the United Nations. Mr Urwin was awarded Australia’s Public Service Medal in June 2001 for “Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Australia’s Relationship with the Pacific” and the Centenary Medal in June 2003 for “Outstanding Public Service in Advancing Australia’s Interests in the South Pacific”.

**The Hon. Bruce Billson** has been elected to the House of Representatives for Dunkley, Victoria, four times since 1996. His ministerial appointments include Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs (18.7.04-26.10.04, 6.7.05-), Parliamentary Secretary (Foreign Affairs and Trade) (26.10.04-6.7.05), Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (6.7.05-). He has held several committee positions. He has been a member of the Liberal Party since 1986.