



**HEF RAN TA (THE MORNING STAR)**

**A Biography of Wilson Inia,  
Rotuma's First Senator**

**by Alan Howard**

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## Preface

### PREFACE

I first met Wilson Inia early in the morning on December 26, 1959, at the home of my adopted family in Itu‘muta, on the island of Rotuma. My journal entry for that date begins, “As long as I live, I shall never forget today.” It was only my ninth day on Rotuma, and I was still recovering from the shock of being left on such a remote, isolated island. I was a 25 year old graduate student from Stanford University in California, there to do my anthropology dissertation research. Christmas day had been quite an experience — a midnight mass at Upu Mission Station; a late night supper of chicken, tinned corned beef, taro and *fekei* ‘Rotuman pudding’; watching a group of dancers who had come *fara* to our compound; and later in the day, going *fara* myself with a group from our village. Going *fara* is one of two main activities during the Christmas season on Rotuma. A group of young men and women rent a truck and go on expeditions to other villages where they dance and sing, accompanied by guitars and ukuleles, to be rewarded with gifts of food and drink. It is great fun and participating was a wonderful way to gain acceptance.

“Picnics” are the other way Rotumans celebrate the Christmas holidays. On this particular Boxing Day an expedition was planned to the fabled islet of Hatana, off the west end of Rotuma. Hatana is known as the final haven of Raho, Rotuma’s legendary founder, and the location of a rock shrine to his memory. People rarely visit the islet, and with good reason. The approach is quite dangerous because of high waves and a treacherous reef. It takes skill and bravado to get ashore, and getting off can be an even more formidable challenge.

The main party of picnickers arrived at 6 a.m., headed by Wilson Inia. He had dressed for the occasion in a neatly tailored lavalava, white shirt and leather sandals — his usual attire. He was friendly to me, asking a number of thoughtful questions about my research while maintaining an air of quiet dignity. He exuded a sense of self-confidence, and the respect others had for him was obvious. It was clear to me that the man was a leader.

The excursion to Hatana turned out to be something of an ordeal, particularly for me. My tender feet did not fare well on the reef, and I took several tumbles in the waves. Bravado I may have had, but if it was not for the young men from the village of Losa, I might not have survived. Elisapeti Inia, Wilson’s wife, also took a few tumbles, and we spent some time comparing coral cuts and scrapes, marking the beginning of a life-long friendship. One does not readily forget such an experience, or the people with whom one shares it.

I saw Wilson on a number of other occasions during the year I spent on Rotuma. We talked at times about Rotuman customs, but our most serious discussions were about education. He was eager to hear my views concerning the current state of educational theory in the United States (of which I was less well-informed than he was), and invited me to give a talk at the high

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school where he was Headmaster concerning education in the United States. His awareness of educational issues, and how they applied to Rotuma, greatly impressed me. He made it clear that while he was open to new ideas he felt it was crucial for Rotumans to be selective — to adopt educational practices that suited Rotuman culture and to reject those that did not. With each meeting my respect and admiration for him grew.

I did not return to Rotuma until 1987. In the meantime Wilson Inia had passed away (in 1983), but I was able to renew my friendship with Elisapeti. With my wife, Jan Rensel, who was doing her doctoral research on Rotuma, I spent part of each year from 1987 to 1991 on the island. Seeing the changes that have taken place over the past three decades has stimulated my interest in Rotuman history, both recent and distant. However, I have been somewhat startled — and disconcerted — to find that few Rotumans show an interest in their history.

In some very important respects, Rotumans, along with many other peoples who were colonial subjects, have been deprived of their history. The colonial powers, Great Britain among them, had little interest in glorifying indigenous individuals, especially any who defied their authority. History in the schools was mainly European history, and where the colonies were concerned, only a few indigenous individuals — usually rulers or warriors — were identified, usually for the roles they played in abetting or thwarting the dominant society's agenda. Rarely are they represented as flesh and blood human beings; their biographies are more often than not superficial and shallow. Virtually without representation are those individuals, like Wilson Inia, who had the courage and conviction to look their colonial masters in the eye without blinking. Often times, as in Wilson's case, they fully accepted Christian values and the merits of democratic government, but their acceptance of those very values made them irritants to colonial administrators who demanded compliance rather than encouraging democratic process.

It is no wonder, then, that the only histories available to ex-colonial peoples are so often short on biography. But history without biography is cold and impersonal; it fails to provide the substance for empathetic identification. It lacks the immediacy needed to make a people's history their own, to make history personally meaningful. Heroes — historical models who exemplify the virtues of particular cultural traditions — are a vital part of every group's sense of themselves. I have written this book in order to identify such a hero for the Rotuman people, in the hope that it will help to awaken a concern for their history.

Wilson Inia was a man of high ideals and great integrity, a worthy hero. His leadership did more to shape Rotuma's destiny during the 20th century than that of any other human being. More than anyone else, he established a bridge between western cosmopolitan culture and Rotuma, a bridge that now exists on a firm foundation. The issues he struggled with were at the core of Rotuma's political, economic, social and cultural existence. No account of Rotuma's 20th century history can ignore the role he played.

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Readers will already sense my bias. This biography pays tribute to a man I admired very much. He was a human being, of course, with faults and foibles like the rest of us, and I will try to bring these out, but I have known few people in my life whose virtues so heavily outweighed their faults. Wilson would probably have been embarrassed to receive such praise, for he was a modest man, but I do believe he aspired to virtue with a passion. He believed that the way one lived — the kind of example he set for others — was the true measure of a life. I have written this book in an attempt to communicate to those who did not know him just how well he measured up.

In some respects I am at a disadvantage. The time I spent with Wilson was brief, and unfortunately we never really discussed his life experiences in any detail. To make matters worse, most of his personal papers, which were stored in a garage, were destroyed in a hurricane on Rotuma. I have therefore had to rely on interviews with people who knew him well and on the few documents that survived the storm. Most important for gaining insight into Wilson as a man have been extensive interviews with his widow, Elisapeti, and their two daughters, Betty and Susana. Elisapeti is a dear friend whom I admire as much as I do Wilson. She, too, is a model of Rotuman virtue, and has exercised leadership among Rotuman women comparable to that of her husband among Rotuman men. My wife and I have had the privilege of staying with Elisapeti in the home she shared with Wilson in the village of Savlei. This has given us an opportunity not only to talk with her about him, but to experience first hand one of the main environments in which he lived and worked. The house, which he designed and helped to build, still reflects his presence. Among the surviving papers were letters that Wilson had sent to Elisapeti when he was a Senator; his diary during a trip to England, Scotland, India and Sri Lanka in 1958 to study co-operatives; a diary kept by Elisapeti during his final illness; and miscellaneous certificates, awards, citations and letters from officials. Elisapeti kindly made all these materials available to me, as well as the pictures of Wilson appearing in this volume.

I interviewed Betty and Susana Inia in Suva, Fiji, where they live and work. Both were generous with their time and shared their recollections of family life when they were growing up as well as their experiences with him in his later years. Their reminiscences helped greatly to convey to me what kind of man he was, and how his beliefs translated into action in everyday life. Betty was also kind enough to let me copy a notebook in which he composed sermons delivered as a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. The notebook proved an important source for understanding his ideas concerning morality, ethics and Christian living.

I also have interviewed a number of individuals whom Wilson influenced as students, and some who worked with him in founding the Rotuman Co-operative Association. Most significant of these were discussions with Reverend Jione Lagi, Rave Fonmoa and Rupeti Vaivao. I also benefited greatly from discussions with Josefa Rigamoto, a lifelong friend of

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Wilson's and a man of comparable stature. In addition, some of the life history interviews I conducted in 1960 provide information concerning Wilson's influence as a teacher and role model. I am grateful to all of these people for their generous co-operation.

In many respects the most revealing information concerning the working of Wilson Inia's mind is contained in his Senate speeches, which are well documented in the Hansard. The speeches — over a twelve year period from 1970 to 1982 — provide valuable insights into his thinking on a wide range of issues, and give a sense of his oratorical style. I have drawn liberally from them, including excerpts wherever they help to illustrate his thinking. Mari Ralifo and Luisa Finiasi assisted by photocopying speeches in volumes not available to me in Honolulu. I am extremely grateful for their conscientious efforts.

Since Senate speeches are recorded in full, with asides and redundancies, I have found it necessary to edit them somewhat. Omissions are indicated by three periods (...), and where I felt comprehension would be aided by adding a word or phrase, or by substituting words or phrases, I used brackets [ ]. I also took the liberty of altering punctuation where appropriate.

Finally, I have attempted to collect all the documents available on recent Rotuman history, including reports from District Officers, Minutes of Rotuma Council meetings and miscellaneous correspondence. I would like to thank the District Officer on Rotuma over these past few years, Fred Susau, for making documents in his office available to me, and the staff at the Fiji National Archives in Suva for their gracious assistance. Wilson Inia was a central figure in recent Rotuman history; the documents often provide a clear context for his words and actions.

My debt of gratitude goes far beyond this, however. Innumerable Rotuman individuals have assisted my research by extending the hand of friendship, and I would like to thank all of them. Ultimately I hope this book will prove an inspiration to current and future generations of Rotuman children. I dedicate this book to them.

Vilsoni Hereniko suggested the title for this book. *Hef Ran Ta* is Rotuman for The Morning Star. I believe this to be an apt metaphor for Wilson Inia for several reasons. The morning star rises in the east just before sunrise, before the dawn of a new day. Sailors rely on it for navigation. Wilson Inia was a star of sorts for the Rotuman people. He led them into the dawning of a new age; he was the beacon by which they steered in their transition from Oceanic hinterland to modern society. And he was born in Noa'tau, on the eastern end of Rotuma.



## Chapter 1: A Career of Service

### CHAPTER 1: A CAREER OF SERVICE

Wilson Inia was born on October 2, 1908 in the village of Motusa on the island of Rotuma. His parents had returned recently from Papua New Guinea, where they served as Methodist missionaries. For readers unfamiliar with Rotuma, some background information about the island may help to provide a context for Wilson's life experiences and achievements.

#### Rotuma

Rotuma is a small, isolated island some 465 kilometers north of Fiji. A volcanic formation of about 43 square kilometers, with extremely fertile soil, the island lies near the intersection of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia, and its people show influences from all three cultural areas. The Rotuman language, for example, which is unique in many respects, has borrowed vocabulary from both Samoan and Tongan. Rotuma also has cultural ties with the Polynesian islands of Tuvalu to the north, and Wallis and Futuna to the east. In addition it has known connections with islands in Kiribati.

The population thus has drawn from diverse gene pools, including substantial amounts from Europeans who began visiting Rotuma in sizable numbers during the 1820s. Physically, therefore, Rotumans manifest a surprising range of characteristics for such a small island population, but their general appearance places them within the spectrum of Polynesian peoples. When Rotuma was first sighted by Europeans in 1791, it had a population of perhaps three to four thousand people.<sup>1</sup> Following a period of decline (culminating in the measles epidemic of 1911 when the number of Rotumans dropped below two thousand) the population rebounded and has grown steadily since. It now exceeds nine thousand, with about three-fourths of Rotumans now resident in Fiji.

In the decades following first contact, the luxuriant island became a favourite provisioning station for whalers. They introduced Rotumans to western-style commerce and left numerous renegade sailors, some of whom became important bridges between the two cultures. The ships that called provided Rotuman men with opportunities to sign aboard, and they soon established a reputation as reliable, trustworthy seamen. As a result, large numbers of Rotuman men travelled widely, and those who returned home after years abroad introduced a cosmopolitan flavor to this otherwise isolated island.

Missionization began before mid-century. First to arrive, in 1839, was John Williams of the London Missionary Society, who left some Christianized Samoans to spread the faith. They

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<sup>1</sup> Early estimates vary between two and five thousand.

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were unsuccessful and were replaced by Wesleyan Tongans, and eventually by a series of European Anglo missionaries. Following on the heels of the Wesleyans were French Catholic missionaries. Unfortunately, the French priests and Anglo ministers had little tolerance for one another, and a religious factionalism developed. Each mission marked off its own territorial domain and jealously guarded its converts from the “evil” influences of the other side. An increasing number of disputes arose between adherents of the opposing faiths, often over the right to build churches on communally held land. Antagonisms between Wesleyans and Catholics continued to mount until 1878, when they culminated in a war between the two groups in which the numerically dominant Wesleyans triumphed.

The unrest following the 1878 war led the paramount chiefs of Rotuma’s seven districts to petition the Queen of England for annexation, and in 1881 they officially ceded the island to Great Britain. The Crown decided that Rotuma should be administered as part of the Colony of Fiji, which had been ceded seven years previously, in 1874. Fortunately for the Rotumans, government under English law had the desired effect of mitigating conflict, although antagonisms between the two religious groups remained for years to come.

Following cession the colonial administration did what it could to foster the growth of trade and to bring the “benefits of civilization,” including the luxury of Western material culture, to this remote land. Before the arrival of Europeans, the Rotuman economy consisted of dry land agriculture, fishing, animal husbandry, and a system of ceremonial exchange. For subsistence Rotumans depended on the characteristic Polynesian root crops—taro and yams—supplemented by coconuts, fruit and seafood. Pigs and fowl, though sometimes used as food staples, were generally reserved for ceremonial occasions. Pigs in particular, along with fine mats (*apei*) woven by the women, played a major role in ceremonial exchanges at weddings, funerals and other public ceremonies. They were also given as gifts when formally expressing gratitude or apologizing for wrongs.

During the 1870s, well before Cession, the first commercial traders established themselves in Rotuma, and began exporting copra (as well as smaller quantities of coconuts, coconut oil and kava) and importing trade goods of European manufacture. Several different companies were represented at various times, but eventually two firms, Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp, came to dominate trade.

Rotuma’s subsistence economy remained robust despite the addition of the commercial economy, except perhaps for the addition of money as a medium of exchange. Increased access to European goods, however, altered the aspirations and to some extent the standard of living of the Rotuman people. It also resulted in Rotuma’s economy becoming inextricably tied to Fiji’s. Previously exotic commodities came to be considered necessities. To acquire European goods people needed money, which most Rotumans could only obtain by selling copra, which was

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shipped to Fiji. This resulted in a growing economic dependence on the urban commercial market.

Economic dependence on commercial exports had many ramifications for life on Rotuma. To begin with, fluctuations in the price of copra on the world market touched upon most areas of life by affecting the amount of money available. Lavish weddings, for example, were postponed or eliminated when low copra prices made money scarce. Since the price of manufactured goods remained stable, a fall in the price required an increase in production to maintain the same standard of living.

Rotumans felt frustrated by their inability to control their own commerce, and complained bitterly about the firms' policies, which seemed to them arbitrary and self-serving. They resented being told that these policies derived from Fiji, Australia or elsewhere by executives they had never seen, and who had no understanding of their circumstances. Their complaints were generally ignored. On several occasions they unsuccessfully attempted to gain control of their commerce, usually with disastrous results. These were the conditions that Wilson Inia found on Rotuma when he returned in 1953.

Schooling on the island was entirely in the hands of missionaries until the late 1920s. As elsewhere, missionary education focused on learning to read the Bible. The Catholics established schools at their two main mission stations, Sumi and Upu, and the Methodists started a school at Tia, near the main village of Motusa. European mission sisters, together with a native assistant, ran the school and provided instruction up to the third standard. To go further students had to attend mission schools in Fiji.

During the colonial period the Resident Commissioners, and later the District Officers who replaced them, were dominant figures on Rotuma. They thoroughly usurped the authority of the district chiefs (*gagaj 'es itu'u*), who previously had governed the island. District chiefs are selected by *mosega*, bilateral kin groups that hold rights to certain titles. Ordinarily they hold their titles for life, although the *mosega* may depose them for abusing the privileges of their office. Chiefs are also deposed for moral transgressions resulting in arrest and incarceration, even for one day. Chiefs are vital participants in ceremonies since they lend dignity to such occasions as honoured guests. They are also supposed to be leaders within their districts, and are expected to organize labour for communal events through the cooperation of village sub-chiefs. District chiefs also sit in Council to consider island-wide policies and matters of administration. During the colonial period, however, they were mere advisors to the Resident Commissioners or District Officers, who more often than not ignored their advice. Indeed, the colonial government rendered the chiefs politically impotent; they were reduced to messengers between colonial officials and the people in their districts. Following Fiji's independence in 1970 circumstances changed, and chiefs came to play a more active role in Rotuman politics. Wilson Inia never

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sought a chiefly title, but he appreciated the role that chiefs played in Rotuman culture and respected their authority.

Finally something must be said about Rotuman values, which emphasize non-violence, a respect for the autonomy of others, generosity, self-reliance, nurturance of the weak and helpless, and humility. They have much in common with fundamental Christian values, and for Wilson their mutual reinforcement led to a powerful model of righteousness that he strove to emulate.

### The Path to Excellence

Few of Wilson's cohort survived the measles epidemic of 1911, which killed nearly one-fourth of the population and most of the young children on the island, but fortunately Wilson was in Fiji with his parents when the epidemic struck. At age six he was sent to the Jubilee School in Suva, but while still in the first grade, he was transferred to the Marist Brothers School, which he attended through the fifth grade.

In 1920, at the age of twelve, Wilson returned to Rotuma and remained with his family for nearly two years, learning basic subsistence skills including farming, fishing and cutting copra. He also attended the Methodist missionary school at Tia (see map), where Rotuman children studied the Bible while learning to read and write. He went back to Fiji in 1922 to attend Davuilevu Boy's School, which was run by the Methodist Missionary Society of Australia. There he learned mathematics and bookkeeping, along with carpentry, plumbing and agriculture.

The next year, after completing courses at the Boy's School, Wilson was admitted to the Teacher's Training Institute at Davuilevu. He passed the Pupil Teacher's Qualifying Exam and was appointed "Pupil Teacher." In addition he took the level IV Teacher's Certificate Examinations and passed in all subjects.

At age sixteen Wilson completed teacher's training and was assigned to teach at Vuli Levu School, where he taught men much older than himself, many of them married. He passed the level III Teacher's Certificate Examinations in methods, arithmetic, vernacular Fijian, geography, history, hygiene, drawing, English, sewing and agriculture, all in his first attempt. The following year, in 1925, he began teaching at Davuilevu Boy's School.

He joined the Boy Scouts in 1926 and obtained a tenderfoot badge. Again displaying the diligence that was his hallmark, the following year, at the age of 18, Wilson was notified that he possessed all the qualifications required for scoutmaster. He began an active career in that capacity, and some years later attended a Scout jamboree in New Zealand.

He also began a life-long career as lay preacher at age 18, and was sent to preach (in English) at Dilkusha, an Indian church-run orphanage. Wilson said that he was quite nervous about giving his first sermon, but whatever inhibitions he may have had initially were soon

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overcome, and he became a brilliant orator. The oratorical skills he developed at the pulpit served him well later on as a senator.

In 1931 Wilson left Davuilevu Boy's School and accepted the position of Teacher's Training Tutor at Davuilevu Teacher's Training Institution. The following year he passed the exam for a level II Teacher's Certificate. He stayed at the Institution for fifteen years, tutoring in English, mathematics and hygiene. Always ready to take advantage of opportunities to learn new skills, he studied first aid and passed an exam administered by St. John's Ambulance Association.

During this period Wilson went on a deputation as Methodist preacher to Australia for two years (1938-9), preaching mostly to white Australians in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Tasmania, and attended, as Fiji representative, a World Meeting of the International Missionary Council in Madras, India (1938). He also met his future wife, Elisapeti, who attended Davuilevu Teacher's Training Institution for two years, and emerged as Rotuma's first qualified female teacher. Wilson and Elisapeti, who was 17 years younger than him, were married on March 18, 1947 on Rotuma, shortly before he assumed the position of Headmaster at Richmond School on the island of Kadavu. He was the first non-European to serve in that post. In 1947 he was also appointed Justice of the Peace for the Southern District, Colony of Fiji, and a member of the Methodist Synod of Fiji, which he served until 1952.

The five years Wilson and Elisapeti spent on Kadavu (1947-1953) were golden years, and set the foundation for a rock-solid marital partnership. Their first two children, Betty and Susana, were born there. Their son Savea was born later on Rotuma.

In 1953 the family returned to Rotuma on furlough. The District Officer, Fred Ieli, and district chiefs wanted to start a high school, and took the opportunity to persuade Wilson to take on the job. They acceded to the request with mixed feelings, and Wilson was appointed Headmaster of the Malhaha School. Elisapeti taught class 7 and Wilson class 8. Shortly thereafter they requested and received permission from the Education Department to start Form III, and in 1957 Wilson was promoted to Master First Class. The following year he was appointed Headmaster of the newly founded Rotuma High School.

Wilson and Elisapeti took up residence in the district of Malhaha, where the school and headmaster's house were located, and immediately became involved in both district and island-wide affairs. He took an active role in the Church and in 1954 was appointed Chief Circuit Steward, Rotuma division of the Methodist Church. In 1960 he was again appointed Justice of the Peace, this time for the Eastern Division of the Colony of Fiji, which included Rotuma. In 1965 Wilson Inia received a Certificate of Honour from Queen Elizabeth II for his public service to education in the Colony.

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Wilson also became the guiding light for Rotuma's fledgling co-operative movement, which had begun some four years prior to his transfer to the island. Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp, controlled the copra and retail trades on Rotuma at that time, and imposed rules many people felt oppressive, providing the impetus to start co-operatives. The co-operatives suffered from a lack of knowledgeable leaders as well as a lack of capital, and struggled for survival against the well-financed firms. Upon his arrival in 1953 Wilson advised co-operative members to seek government aid, and wrote to the Registrar for Co-operatives on their behalf. As a result, a Fijian trainer was sent to Rotuma to teach management skills and bookkeeping.

Wilson was convinced that the key to the co-operatives' success was bookkeeping. He expressed the view that if businesses do not keep proper track of money it tends to disappear, resulting in deficits that lead to collapse. He therefore formed, along with the Fijian trainer, a bookkeeping class and opened it to members of the co-operatives and non-members alike. The response was so great that the class had to be divided into two sections, one led by the Fijian trainer, the other by Wilson, who taught bookkeeping in the evenings, without compensation.

A natural leader, Wilson was elected to the Rotuma Island Council as Representative from the district of Malhaha and assumed a major role in formulating policy for the island's development. The Rotuma Island Council is composed of the head chiefs from each of Rotuma's seven districts, an elected representative from each district, the District Officer, and various professionals such as the medical doctor and agricultural officer. The Headmaster of the Rotuma High School is also entitled to attend, so Inia attended in two capacities. At Council meetings he championed the co-operative movement, and persuaded the District Officer to support it.

In 1958 Wilson was granted a scholarship, sponsored by the British Council, to study the operation of co-operatives in England and Scotland. On the way back he stopped in India and Sri Lanka to look at how co-operatives were run in those countries. The sojourn lasted six months, and he came back with some very definite ideas. For the remainder of his life he was the moving force behind the Rotuma Co-operative Association, which was so successful it put Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp out of business.

Following mandatory retirement, at 60 years of age, Wilson and Elisapeti moved to her home village of Savlei in the district of Itu'ti'u. They built a home there, designed by Wilson. But he was too active a man to retire. Taking advantage of government policy, that retired teachers be re-employed as assistant teachers if their services are needed, he asked for and was assigned such status at Motusa School, not far from his new home. He continued to give classes in bookkeeping at the High School, however, so great was his commitment to teaching Rotumans to manage money properly.

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On June 14, 1969 Wilson Inia was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE), and the following year he was chosen (along with Chief Maraf Nataniela and Dr. Lindsay Verrier) to represent Rotuma's interests at the Conference on Fiji's Independence in London. Following Independence, he was chosen by the Rotuma Council to serve as senator, Rotuma's sole representative in the Fiji Legislature. For the next thirteen years, until his death at age 74 in 1983, he spent most of his time in Suva, establishing a reputation as a distinguished legislator and statesman. During that period he also remained active in the Methodist Church, as a Member (1971-73, 1976-78) and Vice-President (1977-78) of the Methodist Conference in Fiji. Up until the end of his life, Wilson Inia placed service to his fellow human beings above all other values. For him, to serve others was to serve God.

## Chapter 2: The Man and his Family

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#### Formative Influences

Wilson Inia was the fourth of eight children born to Varea Aropio and Savea Inia, both of whom were from the district of Noa‘tau, at the east end of Rotuma. Two of his elder siblings — a girl named Tua and a boy named Aptinko — died in childhood, the girl at the age of five, the boy in his second year. One of his younger siblings, Meseini, also died in childhood and another, Marika, passed away in his thirty-sixth year. Of the other three, all of whom survived, Wilson was closest to his elder sister, Pasepa, who remained in Noa‘tau. His younger brothers, George Fonmanu and Kafoa Wilson, he saw less often.

Perhaps because he was sent away to school at such an early age, Wilson was less involved with his extended family than is usual among Rotumans. In later years, his daughter Betty complained that she did not know her relatives on her father’s side because he never bothered to tell her who they were. When she tried to construct a family tree during the Christmas holidays before his death, he was not very helpful. He was concerned, she said, that she might want the information in order to make claims to high status. Indeed, on both his father’s and mother’s side his ancestors held chiefly titles, and he, too, had he wanted, could have claimed a title. His father had taken the title “Urakmat” later in life, but Wilson never aspired to chiefly status, perhaps because he felt it would restrict his service to the community rather than facilitate it.

Shortly before that Christmas the man holding the highest title on the island — Maraf — died, so the title, which belongs to the paramount chief of Noa‘tau, was vacant. Betty jokingly assured her father that she did not want the information to claim the title for herself, that she just wanted to know who her relatives were. But Wilson used the occasion, as he did so often, to underscore the importance of humility and service rather than high status. “When I was a small boy,” he said to Betty, “my father said to me: ‘Your only Lord is there [in heaven]. You don’t have any lord here on land. Your Lord is up there, and he can see everything you do. Whatever you do, if you do it to the best of your ability, that’s it; you don’t even have to go to church.’”

The family was land poor, and money was in short supply. Wilson’s father told him it would be better to get an education, take a job, and make his own living rather than quarrel over land on Rotuma. With that in mind, though he could ill afford it, he sent the young lad to school in Fiji. In Suva, while attending the Marist Brother’s School, Wilson stayed with relatives. He had only two jackets and two pair of trousers, and wore a jacket to school without a shirt because he owned none. He said that sometimes he was unable to go to church with the rest of the family on Sundays because his only clothes, having been washed the day before, had not yet dried. The head of the household, Sese, gave him a large shirt to wear at home so he would not go naked.



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Sese worked at the pier at Walu Bay, and at lunch time Wilson would come home from school and take the old man his lunch. He then had to eat his own lunch quickly, with no time left for playing or relaxing. He said he missed flying kites with the other boys the most. If he came home late from school the old man would scold him and want to know where he had been. For Wilson this was an unhappy time; he felt he was not treated well. Although his father sent him money, it was taken by the family he stayed with to defray the expense of keeping him.

The poverty he experienced when young had important effects on his development. It taught him to be practical and frugal in order to get by. It also gave him a repertoire of stories to tell his wife and children when he wanted to chide them concerning their (from his point of view) sometimes frivolous expenditures.

Following an interlude on Rotuma after finishing grade five at the Marist Brothers' School, Wilson returned to Fiji in 1922, at age thirteen, to continue his education. This time he attended the Methodist missionary primary school at Davuilevu, where he boarded. Discipline at the school was strict, and in addition to his studies he had to work hard in the school garden in order to produce his own food. Here the religious instruction Wilson received from his father was strongly reinforced, instilling in the youngster a powerful sense of Christian morals and ethics founded on Wesleyan doctrine. The school also offered an opportunity, based on necessity, for developing practical skills in carpentry, plumbing, cooking, sewing and agriculture. Wilson proved to be an excellent student, scoring high marks in mathematics and English, and learning basic bookkeeping skills.

On the strength of his performance at the primary school, Wilson was admitted to the Teacher's Training Institution at Davuilevu the next year, after completing grade six. Principal of the Institution was Rev. C.O. Lelean, who took a great interest in the young scholar. As a reward for Wilson's diligence, Lelean presented him with a set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, complete with bookcase. The books still occupy a place of honour in the Inia home in Savlei, Rotuma. The covers of the volumes have been eaten away by insects and the books are falling apart, but they were obviously well used.

Wilson became an avid reader and bibliophile. One gets a keen sense of his love of books, and learning, by glancing around the Inia home. His little study — a room of perhaps 3 x 3 meters, screened against Rotuma's pesky flies and mosquitoes — is lined with shelves from floor to ceiling. Books of every description fill the shelves. Most have had their bindings eaten by insects. Titles range from *Accounting for Seniors*, to Jan Myrdal's report *From a Chinese Village*, to *Lusitania* by David Butler. The books are arranged by topic, indicative of Wilson's orderly mind. On one set of shelves are a number of volumes having to do with the *Bible* and the life of Jesus. Another section features volumes of English literature, including the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*; still another set of shelves contain an array of books on the laws of Fiji.

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In the living room, just across from the *Britannicas*, is a shelf containing a 40 volume set of books on such topics as *Economic Theory*, *Sociology*, *Western Political Philosophy*, *Political Science*, *Rural Settlement and Land Use*, *Economic Growth*, *Socialism*, *Geography and Planning*, and *Modern Psychology*. Above that, on another shelf, is a set of volumes on *Bible* topics: *Job*, *The Minor Prophets*, *Jeremiah Vol. I*, *Isaiah Vol. I and II*, *Psalms*, *St. Mark*, etc.

That books signified to Wilson the highest of values is suggested by the gifts he gave to Elisapeti. When she passed her qualifying exams in 1941 Wilson gave her a copy of *Pear's Encyclopedia* as a gift. When she passed the Jr. Cambridge in 1944 he gave her copies of Knight & Hall's *Geometry* and *Algebra* books. His correspondence is peppered with book orders, and when he was abroad one of his favourite activities was visiting libraries and bookstores. During the days he spent in Suva as a senator he regularly borrowed four books a week from the public library to occupy his leisure time.

When my wife and I visited Elisapeti for a few days in June 1991 I spent some time in the study, looking over his papers. A desk dominates the middle of the room, and a canvas-covered lounge chair takes up most of the remaining floor space. He crafted both pieces himself, along with other furniture, in the carpentry shop at Davuilevu Boy's School. The room is cluttered with relics of prior years: some broken squash racquets, canoe paddles, a softball, helmets for a motorbike, a decrepit Scrabble game. Poignantly on the desk, which is covered with correspondence and other papers, is a plaid pouch, in a somewhat deteriorated condition. It lies open, exposing Wilson's shaving brushes, toothbrush and toiletry articles brought back from the hospital following his death. On one of the higher shelves, above the books, sits a rugby ball, gone flat long ago. Near it is his briefcase, covered with dust. Across the room, also on shelves above the books, are his carpentry tools: a hammer, pair of pliers, chisel, screw drivers, etc. Coils of nylon fishing line hang from the intersection of two upper shelves.

Suspended from one of the shelves is a picture of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, taken during a trip to Fiji. It reads "Welcome" in the center, "Bula" on one side, and the equivalent Hindi greeting on the other. That it hangs there indicates Wilson's loyalty to the British Crown, and his gratitude for the colonial regime's contributions to Rotuma's development. On the wall is a certificate honouring Elisapeti's "Methodist Mission Evangelism and Stewardship," a reminder that Wilson is not the only accomplished member of this family.

Elisapeti said that when he got home from work, at first opportunity he would sit down in his canvas chair and read. She said he would read anything; if there was nothing else available he would even read the children's comic books. "The Phantom" was his favourite. When Susana became a teen-ager Wilson read Mills & Boone romantic novels with her. Busy as he was, he made time for reading. Susana recalls:

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He read bedtime stories to us. On Sunday evenings we hardly went to church. Every Sunday evening he stayed with us, helping with last minute homework ... But it's not really that, it's reading ... He read to us and we read back.

Susana described sitting on a reading table attached to the chair, with her legs on her father's lap while they both read something. Encouraging a love of reading was so important to Wilson that the children could get away with avoiding their designated chores if they were reading — or appeared to be reading. This became one of their favourite scams. He told them that the best way to learn English was to read, and they responded with enthusiasm.

The austerity he experienced at Davuilevu also instilled in young Wilson a strong sense of self-reliance. He learned to cope with minimal assistance from others and came to value his independence. Self-reliance was a theme that ran strong in all of his activities. He preached it for his family, for Rotuma, and in the Senate, for Fiji. Correspondingly, he came to see hard work as a central virtue, worthy of reward. This showed up in the way he responded to his children's wants. He gave them things mostly as a reward for their achievements: passing exams, getting good grades, completing courses or programmes.

### Marriage

Wilson first met Elisapeti (Elizabeth Fiu) while he was recuperating from an illness at the War Memorial Hospital in Suva during 1940. She was visiting a friend who introduced her to Wilson. At the time he was thirty-two years old and she was barely fifteen, so the meeting was not momentous. They did not meet again until 1942, when Elisapeti enrolled in Davuilevu Teacher's Training Institution, where Wilson was teaching. He was her tutor in English, Mathematics and Hygiene. For the two years she spent at the Institution they saw each other frequently, but without romantic involvement. At the end of 1945, while she was enrolled at Lelean Memorial School in Davuilevu, Wilson told Elisapeti of his interest in her:

He said, "I want to give you two years to make up your mind. You can choose anyone you like. You go on with your studies and I'll go on with my work. You know I'm interested in you." He wouldn't say you know I love you; he just said, "You know, I'm interested in you."

After passing the Senior Cambridge Exam in 1945, Elisapeti was awarded a scholarship for advanced teacher's training in New Zealand, but she decided not to go. She and Wilson kept seeing each other, and toward the end of 1946 Elisapeti's mother came to arrange the wedding, which took place at Elisapeti's home in Savlei on March 18, 1947, on her 22nd birthday. The

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wedding was performed by Reverend George Nakaora. The newlyweds stayed in Rotuma for three months before leaving for Kadavu, where Wilson had been appointed Headmaster of Richmond School.

Wilson was a considerate and affectionate husband. As Elisapeti recalled:

From the day we married until his last illness when he was bedridden there was never once when we came to a door that he would enter first. He always stepped back and motioned me to enter or proceed. Sometimes it embarrassed me because in Rotuma and in Fiji, according to our custom—man first, woman last. But with Wilson, self is last.

He always brought me breakfast in bed on my birthdays and on Mothers' Sundays. That's not the usual Rotuman way. Rotumans only do that for someone who is sick.

But being older and somewhat set in his ways, Wilson dominated the relationship. Elisapeti wanted many children, but he wanted a small family and had his way. She tells with amusement how he surprised her one Sunday when he was preaching.

I was sitting there, and all of a sudden he started talking about how when you have children you must feed them, clothe them, and love them, because they are God sent. And then all of a sudden he said: "My wife wants us to have twelve children, but I will have only three." He meant it ... and I said, "I want a dozen." I said, "Now I have two girls; I want two boys." He said, "I might not be able to provide for their education. I'm old, three is enough. One for you, one for me to take our place in the world, and one extra — and that's a profit for the world." He said that one night while preaching in Malhaha.

Elisapeti said that when they first got married Wilson explained to her that births could be planned and controlled, something she did not know at the time. He hung a calendar by the side of their bed and kept track of Elisapeti's fertile periods. They relied on the rhythm method, with complete success.

In a Senate speech, he expressed concern over the effects of excessive childbearing on women's health.

I cannot understand how some [women] give birth to a child every year. I am very much against that. There are laws against cruelty to animals in our country and I feel that there should be some sort of law against cruelty from males to their good wives ... It is a bit too much to give birth to a child every year. It is a wonder that the good wives do not pass away quickly. Perhaps it is due to the

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type of wife you marry. I happened to marry quite a good one and I wanted to preserve her life, and it is only fair that birth control should be used, not only to give satisfaction in marriage but also to preserve the life of the wife. When it came to three, I decided to stop there. Although my wife wanted to make it four; I felt that it was dangerous to have a fourth one (Senate speech, June 25, 1973).

Elisapeti got some compensation by adopting four children of a nephew after her own children had grown up. The nephew had left his wife, to whom Elisapeti and Wilson had grown quite close. When their nephew's wife came to them in despair, saying she wanted to leave Rotuma for Fiji, they discussed the disposition of her six children. The woman said she wanted to take her oldest and youngest children with her, but was prepared to leave the others with the Inias. Wilson offered a cow to be slaughtered and sold the meat for \$300, enough to pay for her passage and initial expenses in Fiji. Wilson and Elisapeti raised the four children as their own. After Wilson's death Elisapeti adopted her sister's daughter's children, Timoci and Kelera; unfortunately Kelera died of complications from dengue fever at Suva Hospital in 1990.

Wilson's frugality was sometimes a point of contention, and he often questioned the need for things which Elisapeti or the children wanted to buy. For example, if she or one of the girls wanted to buy or make a new dress Wilson would query their need for one. Elisapeti argued that it's good to have new clothes, that people look at each other's clothes and if they're dressed nicely it shows they are happy and well. Wilson would take exception and say that he does not look at the way people are dressed. If he wants to know what kind of people they are he looks at their faces, and especially into their eyes.

But his comments were usually softened with humour; he made the issue a subject of teasing rather than harsh denial. Elisapeti told how when she was about to go to Suva Wilson would ask her to make a list of the things she needed to buy. Then, when she would return, he would call Betty and say, "Look at the list and see what your mother actually bought." Inevitably Elisapeti had bought some additional things, and perhaps not everything on the list. Wilson would then tease Elisapeti about her impulsive buying. "You just brought the list, you didn't look at it," he would say.

"I wouldn't say he was very mean with money," Susana mused, "it's not that ... but he said he was satisfied with whatever he had. She elaborated:

... when I'd go and buy a dress for myself, he'd give me some money. He'd say, "Oh that's nice ... carry on and buy something else for yourself," but he didn't spend on himself; we would usually buy his things for him. He'd say he's all right. If we got him a new necktie or something, he would say, "Oh, I must wear it to church this Sunday" ... whoever asks for it he's going to give it away ...

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you know, someone admires it, he would say, “Oh my children bought this; would you like it?” So when he said, “Oh, it’s okay with my old clothes,” we felt it was okay ... Only when he went to the Senate, then he had to have a lot of this and that.

Reflecting on this area of contention between her father and mother, she said:

Her pay was very little, but she was always buying things for us ... buying for all her relatives, I suppose. By the end of the month, she had spent most of her money ... She’s the type of person who helps all her relatives. Anybody who wants something, she does her best to provide. And Dad says:

She’s a spendthrift ... “Think twice,” he would say. He was thinking of the three of us growing up, and Mum was thinking of the old people — those who had to depend so much on the copra and all. She’d give to them; then the next week she’d give all her money to her father’s relatives, and my grandmothers. She said she has a generous heart but Dad said she was wasting her money.

In this respect Elisapeti was much more in tune with Rotuman values. Money is not to be saved for the future; it is to be used to provide for the immediate needs of one’s kinsmen and friends through generous gift-giving. Wilson, however, had his sights set on the children’s education, and on securing the family’s future. For him, this was the very essence of being a successful father, as he made clear in Senate speech concerning the Fiji National Provident Fund:

One of the great responsibilities of a father to a family is to provide a house while he is alive, or if he has passed away, to leave behind sufficient funds for the mother or the children to build a house. That is good advice to a Rotuman whether he be in Suva or in Rotuma. Any father who cannot provide that is a bad father. One of the advantages of a loan [from the Provident Fund] is that you get the house quickly instead of waiting for 10 years to save sufficient funds to buy the house...If [the father] should die, there is his insurance...and all funds left behind to help pay-off the balance and still have some to invest safely somewhere...

Secondly, if a house has already been provided during a man’s lifetime then what is going to be done with the money [from the Provident Fund]? I would be happy to see...it is invested safely [in order to provide] a regular income...for the family — whether I am there or not, and, of course...by then we hope the children would be big enough and [been given] enough education [to] help them provide food and shelter for themselves as well as their old mother. They [would] have

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the security of the house, provided by the father, and a small regular income coming in to help them keep the fire burning inside the house. If you can provide this...you would be a first-class Rotuman, and I think first-class for any race in the world (Senate speech October 16, 1974).

Wilson had learned the value of thrift in childhood, and it assumed a central role in his character. He kept close watch on the family's expenditures, and noted them in his daily journal.<sup>2</sup>

Still he could be extremely generous. He gave lavishly to the church and refused payment for his services to the Rotuma Council and Rotuma Co-operative Association. Even with family he often set aside his concern for thrift in order to please them. As Elisapeti recalled,

He seemed to know what I needed most and always provided it. When we would visit my family he would always bring cartons of corned beef and tinned fish. And as much as he hated smoking, he would bring my mother tins of her favourite tobacco. My family held him in high respect and considered him to be a "real gentleman."

He regarded Rotuman indifference to money matters a major impediment standing in the way of successful business ventures on the island, and saw a great need to teach people — starting with his own family — how to manage finances. He opened a savings account for each of the children and made them keep track of their money. Betty described the way he controlled family expenditures:

For example, [with regard to] weekly supplies ... he would place an order just once a week and we had to work within that amount ... and if we overeat then we end up with grated cassava for the rest of the week ... [We] budgeted, but we hardly ever ended up with cash ... He was the one who went to the co-op; he would go off with a list, and the truck comes back and brings the supplies. And

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<sup>2</sup> Financial considerations also figured prominently in his travel accounts. In September 1980 Wilson attended the 26th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Lusaka, Zambia. He wrote a letter from Nairobi, Kenya, a few days before the conference and described what he had for breakfast and its cost — the equivalent of \$7.16 Fijian — which he obviously felt was excessive. He also included in the letter the cost of his room (\$49.48 Fijian) and the total bill for bed & breakfast (\$64.60 Fijian). Always the schoolteacher, he wrote about the geography of Kenya and about a four hour bus tour through a wild animal sanctuary, including the cost down to the penny (\$108.97 Fijian). His journal from the 1958 trip to England includes similar information on his expenditures, with frequent comments about excessive charges.

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with Mummy in the house, any change goes in the bottle, whether it's one penny or two pennies ... must go into the bottle ... so that we were taught we should never have money lying around. You must always [save it for some purpose].

And when we went to boarding school money was always specified ... This child needs this much money, pocket money for the term, whether you're the chief's daughter or not ... So you only take that much out and have to spend within that limit ... It was a bit different from normal Rotuman society as far as spending is concerned, because people just go to the shop and get money from copra that they cut for the day, and they would spend it. We hardly went to the shop. We were never given any pocket money; in those days what did you need the pocket money for? When we grew up, when we came away, then he would give us pocket money, and it's up to you how you spend it. But I know with Sue and I he would give us so much, and then when he comes at Christmas he would give you extra, because ... it's Christmas time. So you have that, but once it's over, you go back to your limit ... always making you realize that he, too, has to budget.

So we actually got the impression ... that he didn't have much money. We lived with shopkeepers' children and they used to have new clothes [several times] a year, whereas with us, we just [got presents for] a birthday [or on] Christmas day. When we would ask him for money he would say, "Oh, I don't have [any] ... "Can't spare you that." So we got the impression he didn't have much money, all the way through.

Betty did not find out until later in life that the family was much better off financially than it seemed at the time. In addition to saving for the future, she believes he imposed such an austere budget for two reasons. One was to instill in the children a responsible attitude toward money, the other was to avoid affecting a lifestyle for his family that would place them above other Rotumans. Regarding the latter she commented:

People have a lot of respect for teachers, because they think teachers have a lot of money, but this was one teacher that didn't look like he had a lot of money, because we ate the food that the people had ... they had grated cassava and so did we ...

Once I asked him, "What are you to the District Officer?" because when the Governor comes over to Rotuma, the District Officer walks with him, yet when they have a speech it's Dad who makes the speech ... so we used to say, "Surely



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Dad is high ... really highly ranked,” and we would ask him, “You must be very high?”

He said, “Nooo ... I’m just a servant.”

... So we would just accept that, that he’s just like all the other people, because we wear clothes just like other people wear. Their clothes are torn, so are ours ... [This helped] him with his leadership role ... he could identify as part of the crowd, and not apart from the crowd. Because if you are part of the crowd you get positive results faster ... Particularly when he started this co-op [he saw the need for] tight control on money. I think he was trying to teach them to save.

Despite their differences over the way to handle money, Wilson and Elisapeti got along extremely well, becoming closer and closer as the years went by. Both had a sense of humour, which helped them over the rough spots. They frequently teased each other, but it was a tender game, softened by affection. Elisapeti related some examples of their exchanges:

There is a Rotuman belief that when you sneeze it means that someone is thinking about you. When Wilson used to sneeze he would say in Fijian: "Why are you girls thinking of me? Don't you know I'm married?" Elisapeti would laugh and say, "No, it's only germs!"

One time Elisapeti and Wilson were singing hymns side by side in church and Wilson was singing loudly off key. Elisapeti nudged him and whispered that he should sing more softly, but he didn't. Afterwards he chided her and said that he wasn't singing to her, or to the other people in the church, but to God, and God didn't mind if he was off key!

Elisapeti said that one time she asked Wilson how come he slept so well while she often had difficulty. She said he would fall asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. He answered that he had no worries; he had done nothing wrong, that his conscience was clear. Elisapeti asked whether he was implying she could not sleep because she had done wrong things and he responded evasively, that all he knew was that his conscience was clear and had no debt to pay; therefore he could sleep easily.

Although they had occasional disagreements, the children never saw them quarrel. According to Betty:

I think they were very close. I know one thing, we never witnessed them having an argument in front of us ... never. But I knew when they had their

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arguments. Sometimes after dinner we'd be left on our own to do homework. They would go out for a walk. When they'd come back, Mum's eyes were all red. They'd have it out somewhere else. They wouldn't discuss it at night either, because we could hear. It's always done away. And we can always tell when Mum comes back, when she has been crying, we know they have thrashed something out.

Elisapeti said that she and Wilson were both careful not to bring outside problems home.

At home we solved our family problems; in school we marked our papers and left there with all the problems of the day behind, going home to enjoy a home life with the children. Wilson hardly spoke of any difficulty he came across, whether in RCA or elsewhere. We did have our arguments at home and sometimes he would say, "Perhaps you are right. You have a good point there."

The true strength of their relationship and their profound affection for one another, is clearly reflected in their correspondence after Wilson was selected Senator. During his senatorial years they spent much of their time apart. Wilson's responsibilities required his presence in Suva, while Elisapeti, who was still teaching (and serving as elected Representative from her district, Itu'ti'u, in the Rotuma Council) remained at home. His letters to her begin with various salutations: Dear, or My dearest, Betty (short for Elizabeth), Mama, Mummy, Mommy, Darling; one begins with "My dear, dear, dear, dear, Darling." Almost all letters end with multiple X's (kisses). They also communicated once a week by radio-telephone.

Wilson was clearly torn by what he saw as his duty to God and Country and his love for Elisapeti. The separation was agonizing and he constantly sought to justify it for both their sakes. In a letter dated February 22, 1972: he wrote:

"I noticed that you stood extra long at the Oinafa beach when we left for the ship. You looked very lonely and sad. What a married life! The engineer on the boat ... said that this new life of travelling to and from Rotuma must be pretty tough on us both. Yes, he was quite true (sic), but it is part of the work which God wants us to do for His People. With His help and guidance, we can go through with it triumphantly. God Bless your part at Rotuma while I am away!"

Later the same year (August 4), despairing over work obligations that delayed his return to Rotuma, he addressed the same theme.

Thanks for your precious letter that I treasure very much. What a life that we find ourselves in today! God give us strength and work to keep us going for our people and his kingdom. The most difficult part is when work is over and one

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has to come back home. One suddenly finds oneself lost and therefore has to take up a book plus the radio to while away the time waiting to retire. I am glad that you are finding ways of overcoming this 'new' problem. One is prepared to take on any problem anywhere knowing that a time will come when one can return "Home" to one's loved one. Just now it is already four months but no returning home possible. One is beginning to miss some of the good things one is used to for years - good loving company - to re-charge the batteries to tackle the tough jobs of the morrow. Just now one's mate is missing so have to depend on God. Let's hope that God will not forsake us in this our difficult hours. This is the new life we find ourselves in. How long can we keep it up!

For Wilson the separation was a challenge to his religious commitment to public service. He acknowledged the many contributions Elisapeti had made toward achieving his goals, but saw the separation as a test of their character. On August 9th, 1973, he wrote:

I suppose as we get older and we have a few spare moments to sit and ponder over how we used our lives and all God's gifts and can see more clearly those achievements that were worthwhile and how they were brought about, we begin to realize the importance of our 'silent' helpers.

We are grateful for all the guidance, help and preparations given us by our friends, co-workers, teachers and God. But we are grateful for the dear mate who sat alongside us sharing all our woes and joys. It is here that I am thankful for God's greatest gift to me of a precious wife who is a real half of my life and without whom I cannot do very much. God bless you and keep you in these strange surroundings when we find our lives greatly interrupted and kept apart at times for long periods. This is another test whether we can put up with it for God and Country rather than our personal selfish pleasure of being in one another's company. Let us regard this new life a test and a challenge to see what sort of mettle we are made of. As God has given us strength to serve Him in the past together, we pray God that He will give the strength and grace to do his will as we live separately. We can only do this with His Help."

In fact the correspondence between the two transcended their personal lives. Elisapeti was Wilson's main source of information concerning events and public opinion on Rotuma. Her membership on the Rotuma Council provided a privileged position for obtaining insights into the very problems Wilson was addressing in the Senate. For his part, he often salted his letters with

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sage advice, while offering encouragement and praise for her accomplishments. In an undated letter he told her:

The work I am doing cannot be very successful if I don't have a reliable person actually on the island to keep me up to date with all affairs. You will see that Saturday's R/T [radio-telephone calls] are more than only personal love affairs. Bless you for your part!

In response to a particular decision she had made, of which he thoroughly approved, he wrote (on Dec. 13, 1976):

"What a darling! Who will not fall in love with such a 'golden' girl? No wonder 'I always die there.' No chance of running away! Don't make it too hot, in case I leave the job here and dash back to you & your loving arms. When I hear your dear voice on Saturdays, I almost could smell you and feel your dear lips on mine. It is so loving and wonderful. God bless you for those delicious moments. These are some of the things and feelings that could not be said [over the radio-telephone] but can only feel and dream about it. It is charging one's spiritual batteries with one's loved one. Thank you my beloved. It is a reminder of the early days when we fell in love with each other. The magnetic power that draws us together. We thank God for those hours and the renewal of the same Love in these later days. Absence seems to make love grow stronger rather than weaker."

To express their affection to one another while apart they had to rely on letters rather than the radio-telephone because the latter afforded no privacy. Conversations were open for everyone present to hear, and the couple were shy about expressing themselves openly in public. In this sense they were acting in accordance with Rotuman norms, which discourage open expressions of affection. To get around the problem Wilson suggested a code (letter dated February 22, 1972):

It is very pleasing to be able to call you 'darling' on paper although rather unheard over the air on Saturdays. I am inclined to use a secret term known only to us but not to any. It must not be one that is embarrassing or annoying. What about "DL" e.g. "Good-bye DL" on Radio-Telephone. This should be a very good ending conveying all that is deep within us and none the wiser. Let us use this if you have not got anything better. DL abbreviation for "Darling."

On Rotuma Elisapeti also complained about the lack of privacy afforded people talking on the radio-telephone. She told a visiting delegation of department heads from Fiji that she wanted to

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be able to talk to her husband without being overheard; they responded by authorizing construction of a partition that allowed for greater privacy.

Even the money issue eventually dissolved when the children had grown and their educations were assured. Wilson became much less cautious about spending money in later years and in fact became something of a soft touch, but not without ambivalence. He continued his disapproval of extravagance until the end. Still, he was prepared to give generously if it would please his wife and children. Following one period in which he spent quite a lot of money catering to their desires Elisapeti expressed some concern about how it would affect the family's finances. Wilson replied (letter dated January 14, 1972):

As for the great money hand outs I am doing for you and Betty this year, I think it justified. You both have worked hard and should be thanked. I hope that you both will not think of this as an opportunity for extravagance. You both deserve such good clothes, trips overseas and re-vitalizing to cope with greater responsibilities which lie ahead for the part women will play in the affairs of this Dominion. We badly need dedicated leaders who are not afraid to work hard without looking around for reward or honours. You are well fitted for this job ...

Yes, it is very true that I have never spent so much money on my little family in so short a time, especially on such unnecessary things as clothing and shiny trinkets to decorate the body. This year, God has been very good to me especially as I have given up all high salaries and am down on a very low one. But God has never forgotten me and has provided for all our needs and therefore it is only fair that I pass on to you members of the family some of it. You have helped me greatly to stand up to all the strains of the new separation life. But unfortunately it seems that the need for me to take the job on just now is so great that I dare not dodge it. Our people need me for the job and I have to bow to their wishes. Their wishes I regard as God's wishes and until they find a better substitute, I have to carry on. God Bless you all for making such a 'lonely' life bearable.

### Fatherhood

A little more than a year after their marriage, on April 1, 1948, Elisapeti gave birth to their first child, Elizabeth Fagmanuia (known as Betty). At the time Wilson was nearly forty years old. A second child, Susana Surkafa, came three years later, on May 3, 1951. Both daughters were born on the island of Kadavu, while Wilson was Headmaster of Richmond School. Their

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only son, Wilson Savea (known as Savea), was born in Elisapeti's home village of Savlei on July 4, 1955, two years after the couple had moved to Rotuma.

When the children were young Wilson's work-related responsibilities kept him from spending much time with them. Richmond was a boarding school, and Wilson was responsible for seeing to it that it was well supplied with food. This, along with his church and community activities, left little time for his growing family. When the family moved to Rotuma the venue changed, but Wilson's work load did not; if anything, it increased. At the outset he became involved in adult education, both formally and informally, feeling it was a necessary step if he were to gain parental support for building and maintaining a high school. But he was much too conscientious to neglect his parental responsibilities. He compensated for frequent absences by establishing family routines. According to Betty:

He was so concerned with setting up the school that we didn't see much of him at home, but although he wasn't at home he was the sort of person who makes his presence felt — very much so because of his time-tabling programmes; he was a good one for that! ... From this time to that time you do this, this and this, so even when he's not home ... it's built in ... From this time to that time homework; bedtime 8 o'clock. As to who does the dishes, that's Mum's bailiwick. His emphasis was always on the homework and the bedtime — eight o'clock was the time that he set.

His notions of childrearing stemmed from his association with European couples he had known at Davuilevu, and from books he had read. They certainly were not typically Rotuman, or Fijian; Rotuman children do not generally go to bed by the clock. Wilson did not believe in pampering children, infants included. He was concerned that indulging infants would lead to spoiled children and that the first few years were critical for character development. When Betty was a baby they raised her according to a baby book which suggested setting a definite schedule for feeding, mothering, sleeping, etc. and sticking to it. Elisapeti said that at first it was hard for her to do; she wanted to hold the baby more often than suggested, but Wilson admonished her. He did not want to reward a crying child by coddling. Infants should be put down to sleep rather than carried in someone's arms until they slumbered. If they cry, check them to see if they are wet; if so, change the diaper. But if nothing is wrong, let them cry themselves to sleep. He was deeply concerned, I believe, with discouraging dependency. Elisapeti said that the strategy was very effective, recalling that she never had a problem with the children crying when they were infants.

Almost everything Wilson did as a father was with educational purposes in mind. He set rules and imposed punishment — which meant a spanking with his belt — when they were

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broken. But he never failed to make clear to the children why they were being punished, and never struck them in anger. So important was the educational value he placed on discipline, he once punished Betty in front of the entire student body at school. He wanted to communicate, it seems, the importance of universal justice — that no one, not even his own children, should be permitted to escape punishment for wrongdoing.

Betty, the oldest and most mischievous of the children, bore the brunt of his public displays:

Any person who went through the Malhaha School will tell you [about the] times I was beaten in front of the school with his belt ... One time he ... came back from the shop and ... left some change on his dressing table. Everybody was buying chewing gum, so I took 6 pence, and went to buy some ... and he came and said, “Who took some money?” And I kept quiet. Eventually, when he found out that I took the money, he didn't belt me in the house, he belted me in front of the school ... to try and teach a lesson to the children — that you must not steal. The first few times I was very embarrassed, but towards the end it didn't really bother me. He would belt me, and being me... I liked to get into mischief all the time. If someone dared me to climb a coconut tree, I'd do it ... climb the coconut tree even if it doesn't belong to us.

He'd say, “What are you supposed to do?”

And I'd say, “Ask.”

Then, “Did you ask?”

“No.”

“Do you know that's wrong?”

“Yes.”

“OK, tomorrow ... tomorrow in front of the assembly.”

That was the programme for quite some time. But I respected him because he was the type of person who would get you to understand the wrong you have done first, before he gives the punishment. By the time he actually gives you the belting, he's cooled down ... That was where I think I had my most respect for him. He was a great one for sitting down and talking to you and telling you where you were wrong, making sure you understood before he gave you the punishment. Sometimes you'd think you're going to be let off, [but] he'd say, “Because you did wrong, I will have to punish you.” He believed in punishing you if you have to be punished, and [you are supposed to] take it. And you must always say “sorry.” As soon as he hits you, you just disappear into the room and come back

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and say “sorry.” [After it’s over] he’s the one who helps you ...gets the water [to soothe the pain] and takes care of you ...

After that, he was always very fast in forming some sort of counterattack ... to make you forget, win your favor again, because to him, once it’s over, that’s it. There’s no bearing grudges ... He extends to you first. As soon as he [knows you] understand ... but because you did wrong, you must be punished. So once the punishment is given, that’s it, back to square one. So you come back and apologize and you’re sitting on his lap ...

Elisapeti recalled that after the punishing Betty for stealing the six pence, Wilson brought home a carton of chewing gum packets to have on hand whenever Betty wanted some.

Dishonesty and lying were at the head of Wilson’s list of punishable offenses and he did his best to dramatize the consequences. Reverend Jione Lagi was able to relate vividly an instance he recalled from his schooldays. As he remembers it, at a school assembly Wilson told the story of a girl who was sent to the store by her father to buy a school notebook, and without permission used the change to buy herself some lollies. When her father checked the change and found she had bought something else, he asked her about it, but she lied. He told the story without identifying the culprit, but said that the girl in question knew who she was and should step forward. Betty did, and Wilson took off his belt and gave her a hiding in front of the whole assembly. He hit her hard, six times. All the parents and district chiefs were present, and Wilson said that anyone who misbehaved in the same way — that is, lied — would be treated in the same way. Betty was also given the onerous task of hauling stones all day for some men who were working on the school ground.

Harsh as such punishment may seem, it was in fact quite infrequent. Susana only remembers getting the belt once. She violated the rule that children not cry at the dinner table. On this occasion, when she was about 6 or 7 years old, she was tired and in a cranky mood. Wilson admonished her and she started to cry, so he sent her to her room. The follow-up rule was that when through crying, the child must return to the table and apologize. Susana, however, fell asleep and did not return. Wilson went in, woke her up, and spanked her. Susana then apologized and was forgiven.

Elisapeti said she did not regard Wilson as a particularly strict parent, but he believed it was important to have rules and to never make threats you aren't prepared to carry out — and never to lie to your children. She said that when she or Wilson would leave the house and tell the children they'd come back soon, the children were never distressed because they trusted their parents' word.



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The rules Wilson imposed on the Inia household provided a clear sense of order, but the regime was by no means harsh or rigid. In fact the social atmosphere was characterized by strong demonstrations of affection and good humour. More often than not he responded to problems by providing reassurance and teaching the children to cope. For example, Susana tells of a time when she and Betty went swimming unsupervised and almost drowned. Their mother was angry with them for taking foolish risks, but Wilson reacted differently. He was concerned about young Susana's fears, and sought to quiet them. He took her to the beach and calmly asked her to explain what had happened. Afterwards, he took her swimming and tried to build up her confidence again. He used the incident, Susana relates, as an opportunity to teach her something of value.

Wilson also sought to dispel other fears, including a fear, commonplace on Rotuma at the time, of ghosts and malevolent spirits. He saw Christianity as incompatible with such beliefs and taught the children accordingly. As Betty tells the story:

The house we lived in at Malhaha School compound was built on a cemetery. [People] said when they came past they could see two figures outside, and if there is a funeral in the district people used to say, "Oh, that one is walking around" ... But he sort of managed to convince us ... that there was no such things as *'atua* 'ghosts, spirits' ... If there's a funeral on in the district, he'd ask us to go to the [water] tank by the roadside and fetch a basin of water for brushing our teeth at night. By the time we'd come back there's very little left; he'd say, "Go back again." By the time we got back he'd say to you, "Did you see anything?"

"No."

"Did you feel anything?"

"No."

"That's to show you there's no such thing around."

Because of that they were able to leave us so much on our own ... So we used to spend a lot of time on our own, in that big house on the cemetery, while they were busy with adult education or the co-op.

Elisapeti had grown up on Rotuma and was more thoroughly socialized into Rotuman culture. She was not so convinced about the non-existence of *'atua*, and related an occasion soon after their wedding when she had a dream, two nights in a row, where a black man, not a Rotuman, was reaching in the window to get at her. She woke up with a fright and told her mother about it. Her mother told her to shut the window. When Elisapeti suggested this to Wilson he said, "I'll sleep by the window; if anyone reaches in, there'll be a good fight!"

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The two parents complemented each other in their expressive styles. Elisapeti was open about her feelings; when she was angry the children knew it and stayed away. When she was happy they knew she could be counted on for support no matter what. But Wilson brought a calm logic to the household that the children found reassuring. He doctored them when they got sick (informed by his First Aid training a book titled *Family Doctor*) and thoughtfully answered questions about any matter that concerned them. As Elisapeti recalled:

Wilson doctored the children from the time they began teething until they were grown. He also looked after the boarders in Richmond School. Only one child died—from fish poisoning—when Wilson was away at a Syndod meeting. He scolded us for not giving the boy enough castor oil to clear out his intestines.

Betty commented on her father's controlled demeanor:

He was the best doctor, cause Mum was a great one for panicking ... But she's used to relying on him, particularly when you get very sick ... he's cool ... He was always in control of himself ... Maybe there were times when he feels upset, but he's very good at hiding it from us ... because I know he used to spend a lot of time just lying on his own ... not reading ... he would just lie on his chair, and just think for a whole hour in the dark ... At times like that he would be thinking ... reconstructing all those things [that had upset him] ... working things through by thinking [about them].

He taught the children table manners based on own exposure to European practices — to keep their elbows off the table, not to tip their soup bowls toward themselves, etc. — telling them that by learning such things they would be able to go anywhere in the world and be at ease. He even taught the girls tasks usually learned from a mother.

The children felt they could always go to him for assistance, regardless of the problem. Reminiscing, Susana reflected on the ease with which she interacted with her father, as well as the things he taught her:

All my little problems, I found it easier to talk to him than to Mum ... He taught me to swim, to play netball — games that women play — hockey, softball ... [Mum] had other things to do within the community ... she did the cooking, but Dad encouraged us to run races in athletics (not that we can run that fast). He taught us all these little things. He even taught me to wash my clothes ... little things like that.

He had time, even though he had to teach the Rotumans to run the co-operative. He had time to teach me to play netball. I really enjoyed all those little

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sessions ... Swimming ... he taught me to swim like a dog ... I still swim like a dog! ... I can only swim like a dog paddling ... At times he was very tired, but he had time ...

And another thing [I remember], I had long hair when I was in Rotuma, when I was young, and I had these *'ufu* 'head lice' ... [Mum] never had time to do these things, so I'd ask Dad to help me fix my hair, even though he's already tired at the end of the day ... He didn't use his fingers, he used two pens or something ... I'd scratch [my head] and he'd call me: "Come here and let me look for it, in case I find a little *'ufu* ...

I've always thought of him as a mother as well as a father, maybe because of the way he explained things ... Sometimes I tried to fool him; he knows that I'm trying to get away with something ... pulling his leg more or less, but he sits and listens. He was very, very patient.

He also took every opportunity to help the children with their schoolwork when he could. Susana continued:

He never actually taught me in the classroom; only Mum taught me in class 7 ... but he taught me a lot of things ... bookkeeping, for instance. I had a different teacher, but he used to help with all this mental arithmetic. [He was] quick thinking ... I got all that from him. In the classroom it's very difficult to learn the short method, but he knew all these tricks ... mental arithmetic they called it then. He was very good at that.

None of the children spent their teenage years at home; they were sent off to boarding school in Fiji for further education as soon as they had completed studies on the island. After finishing high school, and courses at the University of the South Pacific, they all took employment in Fiji. Although they often returned to Rotuma for the Christmas holidays, this left a gap until Wilson became a senator and stayed for extended periods in Fiji.

He had been somewhat apprehensive about how the children, especially his daughters, would fare in Suva, the big city, and was not reassured following his arrival in Fiji. In a letter to Elisapeti (December 12, 1970) he expressed concern over the girls' accommodation to city life, and worried about their futures.

These modern girls are not concentrating on their studies too seriously. There are too many distractions and wishing to look pretty rather than sitting down in the USP [University of the South Pacific] and stop the roaming part. Too much pocket money is the chief cause!

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But his fears proved unfounded, and when Betty graduated the following year with a Diploma in Education he gave her a cheque for F\$100 to show his appreciation for her efforts. This was a continuation of the rewards for achievement programme Wilson initiated when the children were young. Betty remembered getting her first watch after passing the Fiji Junior Exam with an “A” grade — and it had to be an “A” grade. Passing courses at the University earned Betty a series of rewards, including a stove, refrigerator, writing desk, wardrobe and a video .

In fact Wilson exulted in the successes of his children and enjoyed spending time with them.

... it is a great day when Susana drops in to do my washing. We have great times! Then when it is Saturday, I wait anxiously for 8:30 a.m. for another 'sweet voice' [a call from Elisapeti by radio-telephone] then after that I clear off for Davuilevu to see Savea [their son]. Last holiday he came over to see me on Monday. He is working hard for his Exams. He came 3rd in Form V last test before the External Exams. Vinaka! God Bless the dear boy. He looks thin. I have always sent him money to buy some food to eat with his friends. His things in the last visit were well set out and neat (Letter dated November 15, 1973).

Neatness was important to Wilson; it was a sign of self-discipline and orderliness. At home there was a place for everything. Not only were his books shelved by categories, the drawers in his dresser were also neatly arranged. Handkerchiefs, comb, scissors — all of his accessories — were kept in order, and if someone went through his drawers looking for something he knew it at once. His garden tools had a special place in one corner of the kitchen: a cane knife, a spade, a shovel, a digging fork, a crow bar and a spade especially for digging up yams. "He knew where to put his fingers for what he wanted," Elisapeti said, "whether it was a book or a spade. He said he had no time to search for things out of place."

When travelling, he frequently commented on degrees of order and disorder. A judgment of neatness was a high complement for a town or country. It was also a complement for a son or daughter. He felt the same way about the use of time; it should be used in an orderly fashion. So he established family routines.

The opportunity to spend time with her father in these later years was particularly important for Betty, since she had a somewhat tumultuous relationship with him as a child. Susana was her father's pet; Betty was headstrong and got into trouble more often. She bore the brunt of his discipline and harboured some residual ill-feelings. But the years together in Suva were healing. As Betty tells it:

I've always been very close to him. Not demonstratively, that was more with Sue. But mine was more respect; I used to have a lot of respect for him and

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for whatever advice he gave ... and later on, I was the one he came and lived with, and I looked after him for nearly ten years ... For ten whole years he spent more time with me than with Mum. And I became very close to him ... very close ... to the exclusion of everybody ... my mother, my husband ... I was determined [to be close because] we had spent so much time apart ... And the last years, when he needed me, I just had to be around ...

I value those ten years as the most important in my life, because that was where I was able to sit and just by talking to him, and his talking to me, I could see through all the reasoning. That's where I got the reasoning behind the way his mind has worked all these years. He was trying to portray, maybe in a way, a cruel father to us ... by not giving us pocket money, by punishing us here and there, but in those ten years I was able to reason out exactly why he did this, why he did that. In my childhood, many a time I said he's cruel ... but when I thought back afterwards, I was able to reason it out, and also because I'd become an educationist myself.

There is no doubt that Wilson came to respect Betty's independent spirit. Although her strong-willed attitude had presented disciplinary problems in childhood, she matured into a competent, self-reliant adult, and Wilson admired self-reliance. With Susana, the situation was different. She had been a joy to him as a child, but as she grew up he worried about her dependence on him. With Susana, Wilson had relaxed his reward for achievement regimen, tending toward indulgence. Susana spoke about her father's response to her dependence during her first year away from home, when she was eleven years old:

... all the little things I could think of at school, all the happenings of every day I'd write and tell him, and when I'd cry at night I'd even write it ... One particular thing that he used to mention was to study very well, because one day Dad won't be around; Daddy won't be there to give you pocket money, to look after you ... [He wanted] me to keep seeing that, because whatever I wanted, [I always went] to my father. The little things that girls want, to buy a pair of pants or something, I'd rather tell my Dad ... "Can you send some money for that?" I knew he'd do it. And then he used to write over and tell me that ... Dad might die suddenly and one day you will be without a father. He mentioned it several times.

When Wilson came to Fiji in 1970 Susana was nineteen years old, but their relationship had not changed significantly. She showered him with affection and he continued to indulge her, buying her clothes and the little things that caught her fancy, even after she finished school and had gotten a job. He was her confidant. She told him about her boyfriends, her problems at school,

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her dreams. He listened, and offered sound advice. When he learned, quite unexpectedly upon returning from a trip to Rotuma, that Susana was to be married, he put all his advice in a nutshell. He had never met his prospective son-in-law, but Susana felt he managed to keep his cool:

He came on the day I got married ... on a Friday ... The boat got in at 5 p.m. He was so shocked ... My cousin's husband told him. He went to meet him at the wharf, because I was getting ready to go to church. Anyway, he just got in and I went to see him. He brought his briefcase and sat down and said, "Something happening in this house?"

and I said, "Yes."

and he said, "Oh, okay."

He thought it was the next day, and I said, "No, we're getting married in an hour!"

So he sat down and [gave me] all the last minute advice, together with a scolding, but I think he was worried about Mum ... But you know, I was much closer with my father. I felt I could get round him ... He just accepted it. He said, "Are you going to be happy?"

and I said, "I think so."

and he said, "It's not thinking. This is the end. Daddy will no longer be able to treat you like a little girl."

And I began to cry, and he said, "You can't marry me and your husband at the same time ... you have to learn to live away from Dad."

He talked about finances; I've got to learn to [manage] ... if I have children I have to cater for my family ... [He brought up] what he'd taught me about saving, and about having some money ... never having to rush to Dad.

We talked for about an hour. When we reached church they were still waiting ... an hour later.

Elisapeti did not learn of the wedding until the following day, and was understandably shocked.

In some respects Susana's surprise wedding may have come as a relief to Wilson, since he was spared the task of planning for the kind of huge, expensive reception expected of someone of his status in the Rotuman community. He felt large weddings were a waste of money and resources. When, a few years earlier, Betty was planning to get married, he wrote (letter dated July 19, 1972):

I have agreed that if held in Suva it had better be held in an Hotel to avoid bothering our relatives. The usual price per guest is \$3.50. If we can perform a simple Rotuman ceremony like '*of sope*' [ceremonial haircutting of bride] or '*fau*'

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[wrapping the bride and groom in fine white mats] there to show that we are Rotumans, it should be ample. Writing a cheque will be better. Each party pay for the guests it invited. Total cost will be about \$600 or less.

On that occasion Betty's engagement was broken, but when she did marry Wilson resisted making it a grand affair involving the whole community. He insisted on a small wedding and set a budget of F\$800. He said he would pay for everything, but it had to be kept within budget. As it turned out, Betty said, costs went way over budget, but were met with help from the groom's family and donations from relatives.

In his later years Wilson Inia looked back on his family life and felt a great sense of accomplishment. He knew he had been a loving, considerate husband and a good father. He was satisfied that he and Elisapeti had given their children a firm moral foundation, based on Christian teachings, and he knew that he had taught them the value of a dollar. He felt blessed, and summed it all up in a letter to Elisapeti in one poignant passage (letter dated August 9, 1973):

One of the greatest things we have been blessed with was our little family. We are not pestered very much with corrections...at a time when they are too old and difficult to change. The major problem with youths of today are smoking, drunkenness, laziness, over-sexual, bad language and no respect for their elders. We thank God for the early good foundation [we] laid which bore good results...Most of the problems [of today's youths] really originated from the time children were young and neglected by [their] parents. All the laws we are making to control the youths of today will be hopeless because they are too late. They may control [problems] but can never cure them. Many thanks for the important part you played.

### Values, Ideals and Character

Although he was a man of strong convictions and sense of purpose, Wilson valued humility and openness to the views of others. He favoured dialogue and negotiation as ways of solving problems, and was a good listener. Although he could be tough-minded and severe in his judgment at times, this was balanced by a sense of compassion that infused his ideals. He was especially sympathetic toward the sick, poor and weak. Toward authority, in contrast, he was capable of taking stubborn stands on the grounds of principle, and in so doing displayed considerable courage.

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### Humility

Wilson never forgot his humble roots, and retained both a modest demeanor and a modest lifestyle throughout his life. He remained sensitive to the indigenous status system in Rotuma, and considered himself a servant of the chiefs rather than their social superior. He never sought a chiefly title, and was content to stay in the background when ceremonial honours were being dispensed. This is not to say that he was not highly honoured by Rotumans. He most definitely was, but for him the honours were of minor importance, and sometimes an embarrassment. He scrupulously avoided any displays of status or wealth, and strove to convey the impression of a common man. Elisapeti and her daughters spontaneously described him as a “simple man” who enjoyed simple pleasures. He enjoyed a good joke and could make people laugh; his sense of humour kept him from taking himself too seriously.

When the Inias moved from Kadavu to Rotuma in 1953 they were confronted with some difficult adjustments. One was transportation. There was no public transportation on Rotuma at the time, save for a few government vehicles, trucks operated by the two commercial firms for business purposes, and school buses. Getting around the island was not easy, and since Elisapeti’s family lived some distance from the school compound in Malhaha, where a home was provided them, she suggested that Wilson buy a car. They could well afford one. Wilson refused, arguing that it was not right for them to have a car before any of the chiefs.

They lived in the house provided them on the school campus until Wilson’s mandatory retirement in 1968, when they moved to Elisapeti’s home village of Savlei. Wilson felt it was important to build a modest house, one that would not be ostentatious. He said it would be better to build a small house at first, then add on to it later as need be, and that's what they did. Perhaps he was motivated by the fact that traditionally the houses of chiefs were supposed to be the finest in each district. Other people with money had begun to build fancy houses, some with two stories, but he regarded this as a form of symbolic self-aggrandisement, not in keeping with Rotuman custom, and quite unnecessary. He said any Rotuman, no matter how poor, could build a house like his, adding on bit by bit, year by year. It took ten years to complete his family's new home. He saw this project, too, as an opportunity to teach something to the Rotuman community.

Elisapeti was still teaching at the school in Papea, Oinafa, and had a long commute by bus. She had to leave at 6 a.m. and often went without breakfast, so in 1971 Wilson bought her mini-motorcycle—a Honda 50. He replaced it with a newer one in 1975, and in 1976 bought a small van for her to take to school. By then one of the chiefs owned a car. He insisted on a van because he felt it would be more useful than a car. The van permitted them to carry firewood, coconuts, coconut husks, and food back from the bush, whereas a car’s boot would have been too small.



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In many other small ways he communicated modesty. Rather than put a proper latch on their front door, as some others had done after building modern-style homes, Wilson put on a simple wire hook that could be removed from either side of the door. Elisapeti said that some of their visitors would look for the latch and be surprised to find only this piece of wire. This seemed to indicate his concern for keeping things simple and unostentatious, and since the door could not be locked, it signalled trust for his neighbours.

### Compassion

Wilson's compassionate nature, which was part and parcel of his commitment to a life of service to others, is reflected in his concern for aiding others in time of need, regardless of the discomfort it may have caused him. When he was Headmaster of Richmond School in Kadavu he once took a sick child several miles by rowboat to receive treatment. And on Rotuma he regularly drove people taken ill in the middle of the night to the hospital at the Government Station, several miles away. He did so without complaint, but was annoyed at the attitudes of some medical professionals who did not share his dedication. For Wilson, the medical profession surpassed even teaching in its potential for service, and he could not abide the cavalier attitudes of doctors and nurses he at times encountered. In a speech on the topic, in part inspired by the long lines of waiting patients he observed at a Suva hospital, he told of his own experience, and made a plea for a stronger commitment on the part of medical professionals.

I have had great experience in the carriage of sick people to the hospital in Rotuma. I happen to have the only comfortable car in the whole district of Malhaha. Almost every night people knock at my door. When I open up, there is always someone there saying, "Please, Sir, my son is sick. Can you please take him to the hospital?"

...Well, life is so important that one has to be patient. This is the part that hurts me very greatly. I have been deprived of my sweet sleep in order to save somebody, to rush up to the hospital. Unfortunately these people always ask me to wait for them. If the doctor admits the patient then I may go home, if not, I am asked to please drive them back home. So, I have to sit in the car waiting...I would sit in the car waiting for them while they wait for the doctor. The nurse on duty will attend to the patient first, and unless the nurse feels that the doctor should be called, she will not call him. Sometimes, when she goes across to call the doctor, the reply is, "Wait until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning" — the usual working time. The school teacher who is in the car waiting is ready to save a life, whereas the man armed to preserve life says, "Wait until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning."

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...A lawyer might be able to save somebody in a court case; a teacher may be able to make a child pass a very high examination; but a doctor can save the life of a very loved and dear one. I ask very strongly, those who have been so equipped, blessed by God, the experts in the medical profession, to take on this great love — the love of humanity (Senate speech, May 7, 1971).

He made passionate speeches urging humane treatment for groups as diverse as sugar labourers, war pensioners and prostitutes. In each instance he appealed for his colleagues to empathize with the plight of the people involved. While arguing in support of Government subsidies for the sugar industry he again resorted to personal experience to make his point:

I think particularly of the days when I was very young. At Nausori I paid a visit to the labourers of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company when they lived in (what was known in those days as the Coolie Line) a long building painted black with coal tar and no floor, just earth, cut up into small rooms where the workers lived during those years — 1921 to 1923. Now the picture of the days of the indentured system was not a very nice one. And as time went by and the indentured system was done away with, it was time that the conditions of the good Indian workers were improved as it was very poor and not justified and this system had to be abolished. A new system came in; the tenant farming system introduced by the good Colonial Sugar Refining Company where experts all over the world came to examine and praise and we have it running from those days until today. This perhaps is something that we should congratulate the Colonial Sugar Refining Company on but at the same time we must not forget the good Indian farmers who have worked out in the fields in those far away days and whose descendants today still operate in the sugar industry. They have suffered and suffered very greatly in those far away days up until today and many of them depend entirely on the sugar industry (Senate speech April 7, 1971).

With regard to war pensioners he asked his fellow senators to imagine trying to survive under modern conditions on less than \$20 a month, which was the highest amount allocated at the time, even to those who had been disabled (Senate speech May 20, 1975). And when the issue of prostitution was raised during a discussion of the penal code, Wilson also urged compassion. One might have expected that, given the strength of his moral commitments, he would have condemned the behaviour of women who sold their bodies for money, but he did not believe punishment would solve the problem. Instead he had faith in the healing powers of love. Prostitutes were, in his view, not so much willful sinners as victims of economic hardship:

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I regard this as a problem that cannot be solved externally by legislation and by putting somebody in prison...; it can only be solved internally, from the hearts of the people concerned and nothing else. We have to have great pity on these people who live in a very crowded community where it is not...easy to find one's bread and butter, and...where employment is...difficult, with wages so low...it is not... easy to live, and very often they go back to the old profession. It is a simple way whereby they could use this commodity that they have been blessed with to earn a living...I hope that...by improving social services, we are loving these very people who are actually doing this thing and [that we will] not try and push them away as if they are not human beings. We should love them, get them together and try to help them out. This is the only way in which it could be done...But to shun them, push them away and turn our backs on them will never help (Senate speech March 16, 1971).

### Courage

As much as he believed in order, and in rule by law, Wilson Inia was prepared to defy rules he considered counterproductive or unjust. As Headmaster of the school in Malhaha, for example, he broke Ministry of Education rules and introduced bookkeeping into class seven. When school inspectors admonished him for violating the rules he replied, "Is it not a fact that education is a preparation for life? If this is true, then am I not preparing the native of Rotuma to fit in with Rotuman co-operative societies who have started up and cannot keep their books?" (Senate speech July 30, 1971). The inspectors had to admit he was right, but insisted that he seek approval first. Wilson complained that communication between the "big heads" and himself was impossible, and went ahead anyway. Though threatened with dismissal he refused to budge, and was vindicated years later when the curriculum was altered to better fit education to the needs of rural communities (see Senate speech December 18, 1973).

He likewise had trouble with the Registrar of Co-operatives for not adhering strictly to the rules set down by law. Wilson advocated maintaining a high profit margin on sales in order to insure a stable capital base, then giving dividends at the end of the year depending upon overall profitability. From the Registrar of Co-operative's standpoint this was a violation of the rules governing co-operation, and he accused the Rotuma Co-operative Association (RCA) of operating like a company, subject to taxation. But Wilson continued to fight against rules he saw as inappropriate to the circumstances, as a result of which he engaged in a constant struggle with the Division of Co-operatives. He refused to be deterred by threats to have him transferred off the island.

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Wilson also got into conflicts with Fred Ieli, the District Officer who had taken the initiative to get him to come to Rotuma in 1953. Fred and Wilson were close friends at first. According to the account of Rave Fonmoa, one of Wilson's first bookkeeping trainees and chief assistants, Ieli would often come to consult with Wilson about island affairs. He said Ieli would explain his latest ideas and ask for comments. Wilson would listen patiently, then suggest some reasons why the ideas were flawed. Fonmoa said he would listen to the discussions, and that invariably Ieli would come around to agreeing with Wilson. In part, he attributed the split between the two men to Ieli's jealousy over Inia's increasing popularity — that it involved a loss of face on Ieli's part, since he was District Officer and people should have been coming to him for advice. But according to Fonmoa, Ieli was so moody he often would chase people out rather than listening to them. A second factor leading to the split, in Fonmoa's view, was that Wilson was not reluctant to express criticism of Ieli's handling of affairs to third parties in the course of discussion, and when the criticisms got back to Fred they made him angry.

Fonmoa contrasted the personalities of the two men: Ieli he characterized as being rather self-righteous, prone to express his views in unequivocal terms. He had little difficulty playing an authoritarian role and telling people what they should do. He was free and direct in giving advice. Wilson, on the other hand, was reluctant to make right/wrong judgments in face-to-face encounters. Fonmoa said that when someone would come to Wilson asking for support in a dispute, or voicing a complaint, Wilson would listen carefully, ask some questions, then tell the person to go think about it. He would then often ask someone else to find out what is really going on. Fonmoa said Wilson taught him to be suspicious of those who came with nice, neat, articulate stories that might have been rehearsed — that quite often the first version one gets of a dispute is a highly flawed one. Indeed, even in his Senate speeches Wilson expressed this kind of caution, insisting on hearing all sides to an issue. As he put it in reference to a dispute between labourers and their employers, “there are always two pictures to see in everything” (Senate speech May 13, 1974).

Elisapeti remembered the time Wilson's conflict with Ieli became public:

Wilson never talked about his problems or grievances at home. Everything which annoyed him or saddened him from outside, he never talked about it at home. The split between Ieli and Wilson happened on a Thursday night before Good Friday. A meeting was held that night in the Malhaha School. All the men of the district, about one hundred, were attending. I went to choir practice. I came home and went to sleep. Wilson came after and slept soundly till morning. At breakfast he said it was Good Friday, so he wouldn't have breakfast; he would fast until the afternoon. A policeman named Pene Fauholi came and

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congratulated Wilson. I was wondering what the congratulations were for. The policeman turned to me and said, "Didn't you know that Fred Ieli nailed Inia to the cross last night and hw was a real Christ to us all! He didn't say a word in reply to all the false accusations."

When the policeman went away, I asked Wilson about what happened and he said, "Forget it; it was only a difference of opinion. Fred let off some steam and should be satisfied. He is the winner and I am the loser. Today is Good Friday, so forget about last night." After that Ieli stated to avoid Wilson. When his truck went past our place there was no more waving to us or even looking our way. His head was turned to the other side.

As his split with Ieli intensified, people tended to side with one man or the other, and the community polarized; those with the Education Department and Rotuma Co-operative Association generally sided with Wilson, those who knew Ieli in the Colonial Administration and were loyal to the firms sided with Ieli. A rumour developed in 1960, while I was doing field work on Rotuma, that a move was being made to have Wilson transferred away from the island. The prevailing view was that the District Officer was behind it, with backing from the firms whose business had been severely hurt by the growing success of the RCA. Others thought the Registrar of Co-operatives was also a conspirator, since he opposed Inia's restructuring of the RCA in ways that did not meet the Department's guidelines.

Acting on the rumours, the people of Malhaha District and the members of the co-operative societies sent petitions appealing to Government for Wilson's retention. I have seen no documents that would substantiate the rumour, so the petitions may have been unnecessary. In any case, he remained as Headmaster of Malhaha High School until his retirement in 1967. Wilson was certain that what he was doing for his people was right, and this gave him the courage of his convictions. The support his people gave him in times of stress was all he needed to maintain his course. Intimidation by those in authority did not deter him, perhaps because he felt guided by an authority superior to theirs.

It was our practice not to bring outside problems home. At home we solved our family problems; in school we marked our papers and left there with all the problems of the day behind, going home to enjoy a home life with the children. Wilson hardly spoke of any difficulty he came across, whether in RCA or elsewhere. We did have our arguments at home and sometimes he would say, "Perhaps you are right. You have a good point there."

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### CHAPTER 3: CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

For Wilson Inia religion was much more than membership in a church or a profession of beliefs. It provided a blueprint for living as practical as it was spiritually uplifting. “Christianity is something to be lived and not just talked about,” he said. “Even a minister’s son [which he was] could become something other than a Christian” (Senate speech May 21, 1975). He judged people, including himself, by the moral implications of their actions rather than by their words.

#### Methodism and Service to God

The Protestant ethic, as preached by John Wesley and taught to Wilson at Davuilevu, had a profound effect on the directions he was to take in life. In a Senate speech, the year prior to his death, Wilson summed up what he considered the three great teachings of Wesleyanism:

The first one...is [to] earn as much as you can in an honest way. That means hard work. This fitted in very well with the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning the parable of the talents in the Bible where one man was given five, another two and another one. The ones with five and two worked their talents. When the Master came, they were able to say, “Master, see, you have given me five and I have brought back another five.” The one with...two said, “You have given me two and I have brought back another two.” The Master was very pleased and told them, “You good and faithful servants, enter into my Kingdom.” This is a very good example of expecting everybody to work and work very hard to use our talents to the best of our ability. We differ in talents...some have five, some have two and some only one. The most important thing is to work and work...to the best of your ability in the most honest way.

It was different with the one who had only one talent. When he came in he said, “Sir, you gave me one and I was scared. You are a very hard Master and I went and buried it. See, I have brought it back, it is not lost.” The Master was annoyed, “You lazy servant. I expected you to work very hard.” He even suggested the simplest method of earning by saying, “Why didn’t you put it in the bank? When I come back, you will be able to bring back that one plus interest. You are an unworthy servant.” He was hard with the one who did not use his talent well in this world...

The second teaching is, save as much as you can. When the 5,000 in the Bible were fed by the Master, and the meal was over, he ordered that...which [was] left to be collected. Altogether 12 baskets were filled. All the hard earned savings of poor people must be saved. Save as much as you can. He did not say

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that when you are paid your wages you go and spend them all in the pubs in Suva. Save as much as you can because this fits in very well with the wish of Jesus Christ.

The last one...is, do not forget to give as much as you can. In the Bible, there is a parable...of the rich fool who worked very hard and got rich. The barns he built were full and then he said to himself that he could sit back and be happy. He forgot about all the poor men outside and poor Lazarus was left with no food. He wanted to sit back and have a great time with all the wealth of the world that he had achieved. The Master said, “You big fool, today I will take your life away. Who is going to own all these riches?”

The wealth gained by the talented people of this world is not meant for them to keep for their own selfish uses...I wish to emphasise this because too many people think that the achievements they gained through working very hard and earning so much meant that they could retain them only for their own selves and not be shared (Senate speech May 10, 1982).

As this speech makes clear, Wilson’s religious beliefs laid the foundation for his dedication to a life of service and hard work, as well as for his frugal attitude toward money. He told his daughter Betty on several occasions that his favourite word in the English language was JOY. J-O-Y stands for, he told her, “Jesus, Others, Yourself. Whatever you do, yourself must always be last.” He said that was why he worked so hard for others, trying to improve their standard of living. He told her this in his later years by way of apologising for not having spent more time with her when she was growing up. Having fulfilled his religiously inspired duty he could now spend time with her, and his other children, without feeling self-indulgent.

#### In Support of Religious Education

It was not just for the sake of rhetoric that Wilson peppered his Senate speeches with Biblical quotations and religious references. He firmly believed that religious training was the key to maintaining harmonious relations between Fiji’s ethnically diverse populations. Education alone was not enough. “The key to true harmony in this country of ours is...in closer fellowship with one’s God,” he said. “The more you love your God, the more you will love your fellowmen.” He said this in the context of praising the Administration for recognizing Hindu and Mohammedan holidays. He reasoned that public recognition of these religions would strengthen the hold their teachings held for adherents, and would stimulate consideration for their fellow countrymen, Fijians and Rotumans included. “A country that fails to recognize this will have no harmony. In spite of all the millions of policemen you will bring, you cannot force harmony on people” (Senate speech November 18, 1975).

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He therefore supported religious education in just about every form, independent of denomination. Complete separation of church and State would lead to disaster, he believed, if it meant schools would have to forgo religious teachings in order to gain financial support.

...the future of this great country...is dependent on the type of teaching given to the people who would own this country in days to come. The type of teaching that would best bring about...stability is peace, love and tolerance. Where would you get this? From the schools? With all due respect to our schools we will get these from church schools...

This sort of thing is best started...early. There is no point in starting midway at the secondary school level. It is too late. The joints are stiff and difficult to bend. We should start early and by the time you reach secondary level...you are totally and deeply embedded with this love for God and service for the people around you. This is the great teaching of the churches — to love God and to love one's fellowmen. If you love God you must love your fellowmen (Senate speech March 18, 1981).

When it came to religious education he showed no biases. He praised the efforts of the Catholics in the face of lagging Government support, and urged that assistance be provided all denominations for their educational programmes. He made a point of thanking the Fiji Broadcasting Commission for their early morning devotional services in three languages [Fijian, English, and Hindi??]. "Fear of the Lord is really the beginning of knowledge," he argued (Senate speech December 21, 1971).

He worried that urbanization and commercialization would weaken religious traditions, replacing their values with crass materialism. Life changed between the village and urban areas, he argued, weakening religious teachings and inciting a competition for worldly wealth, with dire consequences for ethnic relations.

The father and mother are both busy working, dashing out early in the mornings and coming back late, and then...dashing off again to a cocktail party or something else. Who is going to look after the children? Who is going to bring them up properly? So, it is not surprising that today, quite a lot is talked about Christianity but it is not lived and I fear that our young generation, if we are not careful, will slip back. And what are they going to miss? I for one can see that the first thing they will miss will be the old Christian teaching. It would disappear and materialism would come into the picture and we would all be dashing after worldly wealth...[T]he three major races would be dashing for the same cake. [He who is] left behind would be very sore about it, not like his father and mother



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[from the village] who had quite a lot of love and tolerance for others (Senate speech May 21, 1975).

All of Wilson's basic values stemmed from his religious training, including his beliefs in the sanctity of life and marriage, his concern for taking care of the poor and helpless, and his attitudes toward crime and punishment.

#### Sanctity of Life and Marriage

His belief in the sanctity of life was based on the notion that life is God-given and should be preserved. For that reason he had an exceptionally high regard for the healing professions.

I regard the medical profession as the most important profession to man...I think we are greatly indebted to the medical profession for preserving the greatest gift God has given this world, and that is the life of a human being...I also wish to impress upon them the importance of their profession (Senate speech May 7, 1971).

His assessment of healers was based more on their dedication than on the nature of their training, however. He therefore objected to proposals to restrict the practice of traditional healers, and to impose strict qualifications on those who might serve as medical practitioners. He, himself, had benefited from treatment by indigenous healers, and he defended their right to practice. I suspect he approved of the spiritual beliefs associated with indigenous medicine, and that he found modern medicine cold and mechanical, perhaps a little too haughty. He provided lengthy testimony during a debate on a bill to regulate medical and dental practices in Fiji:

I would like to say definitely that there is quite a lot of truth and good that can be brought about by these experts who learned their skill long before the Europeans came to Fiji. This is not something that was just picked up from the gutter. We Rotumans have a system. There is the expert for massaging of the back; there is the expert for massaging of the fracture, and every family has been passing that ability from one person to the other over the ages up till today. Although they are not allowed to practice this, this is done illegally...[W]hat can you do when the medical profession cannot tackle the problem? What are we to do when there is only one doctor for the whole island? He is perhaps concerned with the bigger cases and not with the minor ones. I have never seen a doctor massaging, especially when he is qualified. That is something for you fellows who have just joined the medical school [to think about].

I would like to pay tribute to some of these men and women who have been condemned by the medical profession of today. I would like to say that if it had

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not been for one of these illegal doctors, I would not be walking today. In 1958 I was in England and the doctors I saw there could not fix the limp trouble that I had. I came back to Fiji and went to the main hospital here in Suva. They had a look at it — three doctors had a look at it and they gave me pills, one of which looked like filaria pills. One of the doctors definitely told me that I will have this limp right through life. Well, that was not quite a good message, especially for one who had gone right up to England and back to the biggest hospital here in Suva with all our experts. They could not treat my problem. A bush doctor working at the gold mines [in Vatukoula] happened to see me walking one day down a street here in Suva and said he could fix it. I did mention to him that I had been to the big experts but he was quite sure that he had the cure handed down to [his family] from their fore-fathers and he could fix it up. He said there was a particular way of massaging by which he could treat me.

He turned up in Rotuma one day and he massaged me from my head right down to my toes. This was after several months. I was quite sure I was going to limp for life...[T]he first week I could not move, I could not walk; it was very painful, but he said that that was the normal thing. In the second week the pain eased and today you see me walking. That was an illegal way of putting me right, and I am quite sure that that doctor would come under one of these [restrictions]... But I would like to say that this is something that was handed down through their families, from generation to generation. It is well understood also that although I do know how to do the massaging because I feel it done to me, yet they say that because you are not in this family, you will never succeed. There is a fair bit of faith in it, and because we believed that that is something that did not belong to us we never bothered to try and do it on our own. I had to go and see this family and then ask them to do it...It is a family skill. It is something that belongs only to them and they are the only ones who could use it in order to bring about this wonderful cure. It was believed in [pre-European] days...and it is still believed today. And I would like to say this much, we have always done our best to see the modern medical man first; it is only right to go and see the modern medical expert. But in very many cases the modern experts give up. Then what are we going to do? If we do not legalise these people...it would be practised under the table, which is not a very nice thing. Secondly, we would be depriving quite a lot of people of some of the cures of these people. I would like to say also that you will notice that not very many Rotumans are inflicted badly with the polio disease in Fiji. You will never find many Rotumans down with it and I would like to say

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we have a trick. It is a massage by Rotuman doctors and we even massage Europeans as well, and they have been very very thankful for making it possible for them to walk again. I would like to mention this today and pay a tribute to some who have practised illegally for several years...(Senate speech October 13, 1975).

In a subsequent speech he referred to “the great service rendered by these unqualified local countrymen of ours,” and urged that they be given recognition (Senate speech June 30, 1976).

Wilson advocated family planning in order to improve the lives of women and children. He believed that overpopulation was a threat to the country’s well-being, and felt that uncontrolled fertility placed unreasonable burdens on women, but he opposed abortion on moral grounds:

I had been rather alarmed when I heard...that the most successful method...[of population control] abroad, in advanced countries...is abortion...I for one would hesitate..., especially from the moral standpoint...[W]ith all due respect to modern civilisation and to all their wonderful inventions..., to use such highly developed techniques in order to make it possible for a person to commit wrong...would be totally wrong. And although I support family planning very strongly, I hesitate to back a method of control whereby moral standards in our country, particularly Christian moral standards, would disappear, and I would be the last person to agree to it (Senate speech June 25, 1973).

Although he acknowledged its shortcomings, he advocated use of the rhythm method for spacing children.

He also held marriage to be a sacred institution, and opposed legislation that would make divorces easier to obtain. Sound families provides the best foundation upon which to build a modern nation, he believed, and easy divorce constitutes a threat. His views on this topic, like so many of his other views, were premised on the importance of providing children with a solid moral foundation in their early years of life.

It is a way of life for the Rotuman people to be married. Since the day we came into contact with the outside world, we left quite a lot of our old ways of life and adopted some new ones, and one of the new ones is to have a Christian marriage. Today we regard this as a Rotuman way of life, and the Christian way of marriage that we have been taught, and have lived with for the last 100 years, is that this is a sacred thing between the couple and God. It is not a legal contract signed by...great lawyers. No, it is more than that. It is a contract with God and

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there must not be any interfering. One must think very carefully before one marries somebody. You cannot leave your wife aside when you are a little bit tired of her, and find someone else. No, it is a way of life and as my good friend has said, only death [can part us].

...I need not repeat the great harm that would come, should a divorce take place, particularly to the weaker parties, the good lady and the children, especially if they are young.

...The strength of our nation is dependent on the people of Fiji and the people of Fiji are dependent on the types of homes that we have. If you have good, strong homes with plenty of unity, that nation is truly firm and strong because the parties concerned love to live happily and support each other very strongly. The moment division comes in, not only the home is broken, but the nation begins to suffer, because it is totally dependent on the united, happy homes. Fiji's future depends on our young people. If the home is broken, the future of Fiji is also broken. You cannot bring up a good family when there is no father and mother (Senate speech May 4, 1982).

#### Christianity, Greed and Materialism

Wilson's commitment to service, to the notion that good fortune is ultimately a gift from God, led him to champion the causes of the have-nots in Fijian society. He believed it was a moral obligation for the rich to help the poor, and for the Government to pursue a policy of redistributing wealth more equitably. Echoing themes cited earlier, he argued that to maintain multiracial harmony in Fiji, the Government would have to take an active role in this area.

If the distribution of wealth is not fair, is very different, some with millions, some with only a few dollars, some who could eat a meal — just one meal of one thousand dollars and some with only a 20 cent one — if we have too much of this thing, it would be totally wrong...You will never have true harmony in any country where the wealth is so widely distributed... [T]here is nothing wrong with money. Without money we cannot exist. The only great fault with money is the greed for money, when [it] becomes one's God and you want it so much that you see only yourself, [when] you must have everything and none for your friend, none for your fellowmen (Senate speech November 18, 1975).

The opposition between Christian values and materialism was an issue that greatly concerned Wilson, and figured prominently in many of his more passionate speeches. He saw Fiji

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becoming increasingly corrupted by materialistic values, leading to impoverishment, vice and crime. In a debate concerning crimes of violence and hooliganism he made this clear.

[What is] the deep root cause of the whole matter? Once upon a time, the most important thing in the life of the people of this country was God; material wealth [was] last. Today, the whole value of things [has] changed. There is a great trend to change it around — material wealth first, development, development, development, development, day and night. Why? To get more money, more money, more money, *paisa, paisa*; wealth first, God last. When God was first you could walk through the streets of Suva without any trouble. When God is last you have to have bodyguards...(Senate speech July 17, 1974).

#### Drinking Liquor and Smoking

In addition to greed and the pursuit of wealth, Wilson saw liquor as a major contributor to delinquency, crime and moral decay. He was a teetotaler all his life and strongly supported the Methodist ban on consumption of alcoholic beverages. He took the position that liquor impaired one's judgment, and weakened one's commitment to moral principles. In his view it not only was conducive to delinquent behaviour, but a threat to sound judgment in all areas of social life. He was appalled by attitudes, often expressed by his colleagues, that drinking was a harmless, even beneficial, diversion in the context of urban life. To Wilson the drunks that hung out at Suva bars were hardly an encouraging sight, and he feared the effects encouragement of drinking might have on the future of the country. He therefore vigourously opposed proposals to extend legal drinking hours.

I would like to point out that I come from a little island where we do our very best to make the taking of liquor as respectable as possible. We also notice that liquor...causes a person to be abnormal...If a person is abnormal and he holds an important position in the country, in the business field, in the welfare of his people, then his decision-making is also abnormal, and worse still if taken in great quantity. We talk quite a lot...of our being behind in commercial life. Good judgment, correct decision-making is a very important factor. The wrong decision made could lose...thousands of dollars, and perhaps the closing down of the business. And therefore it is not a very wise thing to touch on liquor as if it was something very simple.

We also notice...that whenever liquor is taken, it weakens the character of the person. Strong-charactered people become weak. Their ability to decide that which is right and that which is wrong is not very strong...I think...of a practice

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conducted here in this great commercial city of ours. When you are invited to...see the manager...[to discuss] something very, very important, a contract or a sole of a certain commodity, the first thing you do after shaking hands [and] the usual “good-morning” [is] sit down, and there is a bottle placed in front of you and a glass. And then we have a little chat and sip it slowly...and we gradually work up to the subject. At first [if he is adversely affected] he will definitely say no...but in the end he eases up and says yes, and sometimes it ends up by the sale of his cow and in the old days, the sale of our land...The correct decision is very, very important...and the more [liquor] you take, the more wrong decisions you make. Therefore it is something that we must think about well, and think twice before we...[extend] the period of taking this dangerous drug...[L]et us think very carefully before we allow it to be taken in great quantities.

Another aspect...to be found quite a lot in cities today is that [liquor] breaks down the resistance of women. Without liquor it is not very easy to get on with these pretty girls, but after a glass or two, or maybe three, you get a little bit near her, and it is not surprising... that we have too many women in this country suffering quite a lot. It is not surprising that in the end the young fellows grab them...

The roads in Fiji...are greatly improved...and cars [are able] to increase in speed. What is going to happen if liquor is taken? Abnormal decisions will take place. There will be a slow reaction to...something that should be done very quickly, and what is going to happen? This wonderful road will cause a lot of deaths in the days to come...[T]his is a dangerous drug that if not very well cared for, looked after, will cause a lot of deaths in this country of ours.

In Rotuma...[w]hen there is a dance on, the young men are a little bit embarrassed to come out into the light and bow down to the great lady sitting down for a dance, and therefore the only way to make them a little bolder is to become abnormal—to shoot out in the dark with Rotuman orange wine. After you have sipped one or two bottles you become very bold, walk in, bow down to the good lady and hop around the room without the slightest trouble. This is one use of liquor in my little place. And I would like to point out this great danger. If you had a dance every night throughout the week the Rotuman young men will become abnormal—every night. What about the *tei tei* tomorrow morning? The great production that you preach, the increased productivity—you never get that. You had better think twice before allowing it to be taken so easily. Furthermore, it costs quite a lot. It is very costly for those of you who are here, after adding on

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the freight and other charges when it gets to Rotuma only the rich, perhaps teachers, could use it. The poor Rotumans will have to fall back on the orange wine, buying sugar and doing it in the bush, to bring about this abnormality that they so desire to make them happy at these dances.

...[Q]uite a lot of trouble that the Police Department is meeting today is greatly mixed up with the amount of liquor consumed in this great country of ours, and if the hours are extended and more people consume it then God help our country. As for productivity, it is not surprising that it is so small today. So I would like to point out...that a correct decision should be made by those of us who are responsible for the outer control...by making good laws, but you cannot beat internal control. Internal control is the best of the whole lot, that is, each person decides for himself or herself...that he will not touch this dangerous, abnormal drug (Senate speech December 16, 1975).

Wilson believed that internal controls were primarily a matter of moral training, and could best be instilled by properly educating the young. He concluded his speech concerning the dangers of alcohol with words of thanks to those churches that do their best to encourage abstinence, or at least moderation. And in an earlier speech he emphasized the importance of parents and teachers as models in relation to the consumption of alcohol.

[H]ow can we overcome a social evil like that? I wish to say that it can only come about by educating the people of this dominion while they are still young. I feel that it is the only way. It really starts with the family. How many parents, particularly fathers, when opening a bottle of whiskey or beer say, "Sonny bring me a glass." While he drinks the son is watching. Then afterwards [the son] is told to wash the glasses. This young lad will see it day by day. What is going to happen when this young fellow grows up to be a young man? Will this young lad become a teetotaler? Never! Like father like son. Whatever he sees and lives with for years, he will finish up with...How many families are aware of this great danger that whatever we do has some sort of effect (directly or indirectly, whether you know it or not) on those who are around you. If it happens to be a good thing, well and good for the country. But if it happens to be a bad thing, too bad. How many families in this dominion are aware of this great teaching? I call it teaching...because whatever we do our young children see and of course they always try and imitate dad. And if daddy is a drunkard then the son is going to be a drunkard also. Now, I mention this because we have to teach them now. Very often we are not aware of this great teaching that we are doing at home. Many of

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us think that it will have no effect at all on our children. Very often the young people of today have their starting point with drinks while they are still young. They learn it from dad.

As they grow a bit older they go to school [and] have new teachers. There is some teaching done at home by parents; there is a new teaching done at the schools which they attend. How lucky is the lad who goes to a school where the teachers do not drink; do not drink openly in their faces or come drunk [to school], or smell with drink. Lucky is the child who goes to...a school where you do not have such teachers. Why? Well, children are very fond of imitating their teachers. If you try to disagree with a child the child will still stick up for the teachers and say, "No, our teacher said it is this therefore you must be wrong." If they think so highly of all the teachers of this dominion then all teachers must be aware that whatever they do has a very powerful effect on these young ones. And if the people of today are not very careful then there will be the teaching at home where there is plenty to drink, there will be the extra teaching at school where children even see teachers being drunk. This...is going to have a very strong effect on the life of the young man...(Senate speech March 18, 1971).

But Wilson was pessimistic about winning the battle. The Methodist Church, with its strict rules against drinking, was the rampart from which he fought for this cause, but even this bastion was in danger of being breached. At a General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1972, in Melbourne, Australia, Wilson was shocked by a motion to weaken the rules against alcohol. He expressed his dismay in a letter (dated May 29, 1972) to Elisapeti, and exulted in the role he played in having the motion voted down.

I noticed a lot of changes have come in and Methodism is no longer the same today as it was in 1939. It cannot help being affected by the people around it. One of the greatest things that shocked me was when Conferees wanted to change the Alcohol Law and make it not as strict as [it] is in the Law Book. You can imagine how shocked I was to hear such an attempt. Before the vote was taken I asked for a speech. It was a powerful attack against the motion, which won the day. I wonder how long this TABU will remain so! Perhaps that was what God asked me to do in Melbourne. This is our contribution to His Church and to those who...believe [alcohol is a] great curse to the lives of men and women.

Wilson was also opposed to smoking, but on somewhat different grounds. Smoking was not a moral issue in the same way drinking was; he did not contend that it led to moral decay. Rather



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he saw smoking as a serious threat to good health, with dire consequences for the individual who smoked and for those close to him. He also felt that smokers needed to be considerate of others with regard to their smoking habits, but hoped, as he always did with such matters, that this could be brought about by voluntary compliance rather than prohibitive laws (see Senate speech April 3, 1978).

Wilson's campaign against drinking and smoking through education reached a high point when he introduced into the Senate a resolution, in conjunction with the United Nations declaration of 1979 as the International Year of the Child, on "Education of Public on Use and Abuse of Alcohol and Tobacco." The resolution read:

That this House welcomes the designation by the United Nations of 1979 as the International Year of the Child and, mindful of the fact that more than half of Fiji's population is below the age of 21 years, urges Government to continue to vigorously promote the spiritual, physical and mental growth and well-being of our peoples, especially our children; and in this regard, being very concerned about the reportedly increasing number of crimes and a deterioration of moral values resulting from the consumption of alcohol, resolves that Government do everything possible to immediately set up a special administrative unit which will effectively educate the public about the effects of the use and abuse of alcohol and tobacco (Senate speech April 2, 1979).

In his speech supporting the resolution he reiterated his arguments against alcohol and tobacco, and for recognizing the importance of early education by parents and teachers, as models as well as conveyers of specific information.

As much as he deplored drinking and smoking, and though he crusaded against them in his roles as politician and lay preacher, he never admonished anyone directly. Drinking and smoking were issues that people should be informed about, but as with all such issues, it was up to them to make proper choices. He urged the instilling internal controls — controls of conscience — but did not see it as his business to go around exerting direct pressure on others to do what he thought was right. This reflected the great respect he had for other people's autonomy. As Betty relates:

Yes, he disliked alcohol, he disliked smoking, but not to the extent that it would affect his relationship with the people ... the three of us [children], we all took alcohol, we all smoked at some time or another, and he knew about it, but he felt his job was just to make sure we knew what are the disadvantages. The final decision is yours. He never said to us, "Stop smoking, stop drinking." But he said it in his own way, of course. When he's standing up at the pulpit, that's

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when he preaches at you...You must not smoke. But he doesn't say it to you face-to-face.

#### The Dilemma of Autonomy versus Moral Corruption

Wilson's respect for other people's autonomy, weighed against the moral damage of exposure to corrupting influences, created dilemmas for him. He firmly believed that people had a right to make their own moral decisions, but he also feared they were being subjected to powerful influences that were leading them astray. As a result he was ambivalent about how strict external controls should be, and was somewhat inconsistent in his speechmaking on the topic.

On the one hand he argued that imposing severe restrictions on people would merely whet their appetites for that which was forbidden them, and suggested making liquor available so as to offset the brewing and consumption of even less wholesome beverages.

Some say that if you stop people from drinking they will do the opposite. I suggest that the only way to overcome this is to open the door wide; let them drink and then one day they will stop; they say that in Rotuma. At least if we open our doors wide...there will be no more homebrews. Today, the number of people consuming homebrew is very high. No one is buying the clean modern liquor because it is too expensive and they are unable to afford it. Youths love to go beyond certain things. If you disallow them...past a set boundary, they will try and find a way to go beyond it (Senate speech March 15, 1971).

But he was far from convinced. In a speech just three days later he expressed a quite different point of view, relying on a humorous analogy to make his point.

I remember...an old gentleman once said that if you stay very long with an ugly lady — if you see her often — at first you would not fall for her, but because you see her so often, day after day, her ugliness will no longer appall you and she will appear very handsome, and you will end up marrying her.

Now...I gave that illustration because that can easily happen by opening your doors to alcohol. You do it so often that this dangerous thing no longer becomes dangerous; it is going to be there forever. I feel very sorry for those people who think that one day it is going to disappear. You will live side by side with it forever (Senate speech March 18, 1971).

The conflict between his belief in the autonomy of the individual and a concern for reducing exposure to temptation also came to a head over the issue of film censorship, which he supported

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with reservations. His lengthy speech on the subject, during a debate over the Cinematographic Films Bill of 1971 — a bill proposing censorship — provides insights into his thought and feelings.

I would like to speak on this Bill from the point of view of a teacher. We have been told that to be successful in teaching you have to touch on all the senses...The more senses you touch on, the greater and more powerful the impression you will create in the minds of the children. To only talk, talk and talk is almost hopeless. You have got to go beyond that. Here is the case where you not only talk about something but you show it; you show it to the children, particularly the small ones who gather around and enjoy it, and it sticks there for quite a good while — to many, throughout life. We have a maxim which says: “Seeing is believing.” If you do not see it you never believe what the teacher says. Here is the case in point where [motion] pictures are shown to everybody. If it is a good one the dominion is blessed, if it is a bad one whereby the morality of the dominion would go down, God help us. It is along these lines...that I support this Bill very strongly. Let us hope that those who will be appointed to carry out this great task for the dominion would be the right people.

Now I would like to say a few words on the right people. As I look through the clauses whereby they have to pay more attention to the grading to suit certain audiences I know it is going to be a difficult task. How on earth are we going to say this film would be suitable for children, for children only but not for adults, or for the youths only — those who are in their adulthood stage and no further? Here we are in a dominion where those who live in cities and towns are used to certain things. They say that they are of a fairly highly developed mind, they look at certain things which look very crude to those of us who come from rural areas, but with them they say it is the normal thing; that it is the normal thing to see somebody walk down the streets with just a little thing on. To us it is almost shocking. You will be chased out of the village if you mean to do that. For the censor to try and see what films would suit the youths of Fiji, the adults of Fiji, is not going to be a very easy thing. Perhaps a film would be suitable for adults here in the city of Suva, but I wish to say, it would be most unsuitable in the outer areas, especially in Rotuma. This is a very difficult task and in spite of all the gradings that are written down here...it is going to come up again...that these gradings are no good here but quite good over there.

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You will have quite a number of people who say that the only way to make this thing right is “Do not hide it. Open it up, let it come. Let us see all these things they see in the bigger cities in the world. This is normal practice. It is shown over there in New Zealand and in Australia; why not in Fiji?” And some would even jump to the conclusion...that the more we hide them the greater would be the urge of the youths of today to try and find out what these things are. The best thing to do is to open them up; let them all come and see. [In time]...perhaps, these things [of] today would be fairly casual and probably...two centuries from now they will be so used to it that if you walk down the street with almost nothing on, no one would bother to look at you.

Now, this is the sort of argument that quite a lot of people seem to believe in. My greatest fear is: I hope there will be somebody left to have a look at it. Morality would be so low that we will be just...low animals. This is something that the authorit[ies] today should look into deeply and be quite serious about — to make sure that what is built and firmly established in the lives of the youths of today who will own this place tomorrow is very sound and of a very high standard. If not, God help us.

I wish to say a few more words about this. I wholly support all exhibitions that are laid down here. I think they are quite good. It is the commercial type of films that we wish very strongly to censor. Why — because this is a money-making matter. When it comes to money-making there are some who know no bounds. To them the most important thing is money. As long as they are able to get more money and as long as more and more people come to see these films the better. As for the rest — morality and so on — that is somebody else’s business, not his.

Now, what catches the mind of the people in the dominion? If you very closely watch the young people at a film, if it is a romantic film you will find that they will fall off to sleep because they do not like it. They say it is a silly thing. It is something beyond them, but when it is a Western film with plenty of fighting and shooting and killing, you will find them shouting and screaming. That is the type of film the young ones prefer. They love fighting; they love plenty of action and if you feed them on that sort of thing, what is going to happen in days to come. They will become great fighters. Do we want more fighters? Do we want more shooting? Do we want more killing? If not, we had better correct ourselves while the going is good; I refer particularly to the very young. Now, what about our youth? What appeals to them is love and sex in films. The more women

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expose themselves in films the better...Well, those who are in the business know that the only way in which they can profit is by showing this type of film. Feed them with that sort of film, screen it everyday and...you will get plenty of money. God save the place!

...I see depicted in the films of today quite a lot of stealing and in order to make it look good to the people who are seeing the picture they show almost everything. They even show the detective at work; the Police Department's method of catching these thieves. And here the youths are having a good look at the pictures and saying, "Is that how the police force works?" And they also see how to overcome [the] Police Department's tricks. No wonder the police force in Fiji is finding it very difficult to catch these thieves, particularly in Suva. The youths of Suva learn quite a lot from what they see in these films of today...and if the police force here have not the efficiency of Scotland Yard, God help them! They will never catch these thieves. We are teaching them quite a lot and as I have just said, this is a most powerful way of teaching. Let them see and they will believe; it is very easy. There is no need for you to read, you just see for yourself. This form of teaching is very good, but I must say, very dangerous. It must be controlled. That is one of the reasons why I strongly support the control of these films (Senate speech March 15, 1971).

Having issued all these warnings about the evils of commercial films, he concluded his speech with a plea for including theaters for rural areas, such as Rotuma, in the National Development Plan, precisely because he saw their potential educational benefits. He also saw theaters as one of the amenities that attracted rural dwellers to the cities, and hoped that provision of such facilities in remote areas might help to stem the tide of rural to urban migrants, a problem recognized by all the legislators.

#### Crime and Punishment

Perhaps it was Wilson's strong sense of order that led him to pay a good deal of attention to crime and delinquency in his Senate speeches. He saw the moral fabric of society unraveling in urban Fiji, and was at pains to stem the tide. One might therefore have expected him to advocate severe punishment for criminals, including capital punishment for murderers. But such was not the case. Here, as in most important matters, it was Wilson's Christian values — particularly the values of compassion, forgiveness and mercy — that guided his intellect. The sanctity of life — God given — was also a restraint. He strongly supported a bill before the Senate calling for the abolition of capital punishment, drawing heavily on his notions of Christian virtue to support his argument.

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I rise to support the motion before the House that capital punishment be abolished.

I wish to give my reasons for raising this point. It has been argued that without a good deterrent, murders will be prolonged for ages. Although I am no detective, I wish to say something about a common way in which murders are carried out. There is, according to my humble way of thinking, two ways of committing a murder — one is planned and the other is not. The unplanned one is the common one. This is the one in which the person who commits the offense does so without thinking. It may be during a heated argument, it may be due to strong jealousy or it may be through great fear coming on all of a sudden, and without thinking the murder is committed. Now, if this is the common way in which murders are committed, then...[capital punishment] is not going to be a very strong deterrent because [most murders are committed] without thinking...

My second way of looking at it would be...that because a judge or a lawyer are only human they could quite easily err by passing judgment whereby the person has to be hanged...[To] my humble way of thinking...it would perhaps be better to err on the good side whereby life is restored rather than err where life is taken, and taken unnecessarily...

In addition to that...I regard man as made by God and not by man. If man is the creation of God, then it is up to man, whereby he is given the job of judging man, to be very, very careful in his casting of judgment on man. God has made man in his own image...[He] has created a lovely body and has given all the powers in[to] the hands of man with the hope that man will realise the great love of God for man, and will keep and look after this body in such a way as to be God-like in all things. I regard the body of man highly and if the body of man is that high then it is up to man, when he is called upon to cast judgment on man, to think first of God. That is why I say...that it is not a very easy thing to destroy God's work on earth by casting a sentence that would cause man to lose his own life, and I would press very strongly that if a mistake is to be made, let the mistake be made on the part of preserving God's handiwork...It would be a great pity for man to take over God's work and thus one day destroy man.

It cannot be argued...that this idea of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is the real solution to this problem. I humbly beg...to differ from this idea...It was all right in those far away days but not today, not in the days when Christ has come into the world. I think particularly of this country...[where] once upon a time the idea of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was practised, in

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those far away days...Now a time did come in 1835 [when] people...landed on the eastern side of the dominion and brought in a new teaching, a teaching of Christ...When the Deed of Cession of the Colony was brought in, one of the great things asked...was to make sure to preserve the Christian way of living...

I for one strongly beg that this way of thinking be carried through into the dominion today. This is something we of the rural areas very strongly treasure. We cling very strongly to it. The urban people might argue that this is nonsense, but we still feel that without Christian teaching, without a Christian background to back this new dominion, things will go wrong and go wrong very quickly...One of the great things taught us in this great teaching is to know that God made man. It is the work of God, and it is up to man to love man, to maintain love for one another...We have come to a new way of looking at life today and this new way is not so much an eye for an eye but that if someone should smack you on the side of your cheek, give him the other one. If asked to walk one mile, walk another extra mile with him. Instead of hating your enemy, love him. This is the new teaching that has come because of the love of God that is in the heart of man, realising that the body of man is a creation of God. All must love their fellowmen, and I think that the rural people of this dominion still hold very strongly to this great teaching...

Now a lot of people would say that that is all right provided the person murdered is not your relative. This is something that is very difficult, to make someone love his neighbour after the other fellow has killed his wife or son, but I would like to [ask what happens] where a tooth for a tooth is carried out and life is taken... Does the relationship between the two families improve? I would like to put it to the House that after you have carried out an eye for an eye [the relationship] is not satisfactory; the two families are not happy with each other...

A[n even] better argument would be...two wrongs do not make a right. Or a better way of going about it is: ...do something nice to the other. This is the only way you could bring about great happiness between the family that was wronged — by doing something nice, something good to the other. I hold very strongly to this great Christian teaching...

On the other hand...this person who...would have been hanged...[who] is not now hanged but put in prison for several years, what happens after that? Some would say very little. Some say that perhaps it would have been better to have executed this person rather than confining him all these years to prison; it is very cruel...[T]hat is one way of looking at it. But I wish to remind the House that this

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man, who...committed this murder on the spur of the moment, without thinking...[will have time in prison to] sit down and realise he has done something wrong...If given some years to think about this great wrong that he has done, what is likely to happen? I am...the hopeful type [who believes] that by giving him some more days to live, some more months, some more years,...the spirit of God is likely to come alive inside his heart, where one day he will repent of the wrong he has committed.

According to the great Christian teaching that has come to this great dominion, it has been said that the finding of [one] lost sheep is more valuable than the ninety-nine. The one who has committed this offense, and has been spared his life and is in prison for a couple of years and then one day...suddenly realises the great mistake he has made, comes back, repents and tries to live a new life...is going to be worthy of God. This I feel is what we are here for — the creation of a citizenship inside this dominion [worthy of] the great work of God. And it is along these lines that I beg, and beg very strongly, support of the motion before the House that capital punishment be abolished, and the one committing the crime be spared his life with the hope that one day he will realise the great mistake he has made and ask not only [to be] a citizen of this dominion, but a citizen of the great dominion of God (Senate speech, 5 April 1971).

#### From the Pulpit

In his Senate speeches Wilson drew upon Christian teachings to guide his approach to problems of governance and civil order. These were exercises in applied Christianity, in employing religious values to deal with issues of family life, economics, crime and punishment, censorship and the like. When he took to the pulpit as a lay preacher he addressed even more basic issues. His sermons generally dealt with the core qualities of Christian character. He tried to portray for the congregations he addressed the Christ-like characteristics he deemed central to his notion of a truly moral human being.

Most prominent among the themes he focused on in his preaching were the virtues of civility and humility. In a sermon based on the story of Stephen (Acts 6:1-8, 7:59-60), he raised the question of who shall be chosen, and told the story of a candidate selected as a clerk out of 50 who applied. When the gentleman making the selection was asked why he chose this particular individual, who brought no testimonials or recommendations, his reply was that the candidate had many qualifications that were not on paper. He pointed out that the candidate (a) wiped his feet and (b) closed the door, to show his tidiness and orderliness; (c) picked up a book on the floor, whereas others stepped over it; (d) gave his seat to an old man while waiting — showing



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his manners; (e) his clothes were well brushed; (f) when he signed his name the gentleman saw that the candidate's fingernails were clean; (g) and the candidate had waited quietly for his turn — without pushing. These, the gentleman said, are the better recommendations.

One of his Christmas sermons was in praise of humility, which he considered to be unpopular among the Rotuman people. “We feel that if we are humble, no one will take notice of us, and that we shall be unimportant, or that people will look down on us. But if we are going to be good Christians, we cannot do so unless we are humble, for humility is the most important of Christian virtues.”<sup>3</sup>

He went on to talk about Christ's humility — his birth in a stable and his parents' poverty, his homeless wanderings, his need to borrow necessities from others — and concluded that Christ “could have been born into a priestly family like John the Baptist or into a King's palace, but he chose this way of humility — to show us that even the poorest and lowliest of us could be a good Christian without being wealthy or highly born.”

“Why does God want us to be humble?” he asked.

“God wants us to be humble for our sake, not for His,” he answers, and goes on to say that “we can show our humility by our SERVICE TO ONE ANOTHER.”

His notes on this topic include two anecdotes, one involving Ben Franklin, the other George Washington. The latter involved a story in which the President of the United States was on a tour of inspection and saw a group of soldiers trying to pull a field gun which had its wheels stuck in the mud. A corporal was telling the soldiers what to do. The President stopped and helped the soldiers to get the gun free, then asked the corporal why he wasn't helping the soldiers. The man answered, “I am a corporal,” to which Washington answered, “All right! The next time you want help, send for the President.”

This, Wilson concluded, is the true humility of service. He wrote a brief note in the margins of his notebook: “Ed[ucation] is a great danger.” In another sermon on the same topic he noted: “It is wonderful how much people can do in this world as long as they do not mind who gets the praise. A great deal of our world is spoilt because we look for praise and are hurt if we do not get it.”

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<sup>3</sup> Citations are from Inia's handwritten notebook containing notes for sermons. In some instances the notes are fragmentary, and I have taken the liberty of putting them into complete sentences for the sake of clarity.

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A theme of unostentatious goodness supplements the importance he placed on humility. In a sermon on “What a Good Man Is” he asserted that true goodness is easily seen when the self is suppressed. Using the story of the Biblical character Barnabas, whose goodness Wilson characterizes as of the “weak and gracious” sort, he commented that very often this is classified by the world as of poor quality. But it takes an educated eye to see the harmony of the sober colouring of some great painters, he tells the congregation; a child or vulgar person will prefer showy colours like red and blue heaped together in strong contrasts. The gentler virtues, he advised — patience and meekness, long suffering, sympathy and readiness to put away self for the sake of God and man — are the truly Christian ones. “This gives us COMMON PLACE MEN SOME SATISFACTION KNOWING THAT ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT TALENTED MEN, AND CANNOT BE CLASSIFIED AS GREAT, yet we can have the beauty of GOODNESS AS IS SHOWN IN CHRIST,” he concluded.

His sermons were peppered with anecdotes. Some were from his extensive readings, others from his own family life (his daughters complained that their father often exposed their personal foibles from the pulpit), still others were humorous little stories or jokes he had picked up. For example, in a sermon focusing on the importance of decisiveness and commitment he mentioned the saying that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” then went on to tell the story of a fisherman who returns home and is asked by his wife if he caught anything. “No,” he tells her, “but I influenced a good number.”

Good influences are fine, he suggested, but without definite decision, they are of very little value in deciding a man’s future.

He preached against drinking alcohol and smoking, but framed his arguments from the pulpit in terms of fitness rather than attacking them as morally decadent in themselves. The aim of one of his sermons he defined as “To help Christians to realize that, as members of the Kingdom of God, they are responsible for using aids to physical fitness and avoiding the habits and actions which damage fitness.” Fitness is important not only for our own sake, he preached, but for the sake of others — our illnesses makes the lives of others unhappy by placing burdens upon them. To neglect one’s health is therefore a form of selfishness.

Selfishness was a vice he attacked in other ways as well. He deplored the tendency of people to wait back for others to get things done, and preached self-reliance in a variety of forms. The following story is exemplary:

Once a king wanted to do his best to make his people happier [by doing things for them]. He asked his chief minister what [more] he could do to make his people happier still. The minister smiled and said that he was doing it the wrong way. He must stop doing more things for them. If you do everything [for

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them] they will not be happy but it will increase their complaints and unhappiness. All parents who do this for their children will have the same trouble.

To prove his case the minister took a bag of gold and placed it under a stone he rolled into the centre of the road. A farmer came by and complained about the stone interfering with his cart of produce, but he steered his cart safely by. A soldier passed by and cursed the PWD for not doing their job. A merchant cursed the government for not using tax money properly. After a month's time the king and his minister came back and found that the stone was still there. Everyone thought it was not their business, but somebody else's.

The king called all his people to come to this place. He told them that he, the king, is going to push away the stone for them. He showed them the bag underneath, and put the gold in his pocket. The farmer, soldier and merchant all lamented, "If only I had known."

From that day onwards, his people were prepared to help each other in all their problems.

Governments and parents must learn this good lesson, Wilson preached, to make their people and children happier: "Teach them to help themselves, not to expect to be spoon fed." Indeed, providing people with the tools to be self-reliant was what Wilson Inia, as a teacher, was all about.

## Chapter 4: Soul of a Teacher

### CHAPTER 4: SOUL OF A TEACHER

Wilson Inia was separated from his parents at an early age and sent away to boarding school. To him, teachers became surrogate parents, the primary models that he strove to please and emulate. Most of these teachers were white Methodist missionaries, and they left their mark on the impressionable young man. They instilled in him not only a strong sense of Christian values, but a distinctive notion of what it meant to be a teacher. Being a teacher meant a commitment to selfless dedication to one's students. Education was a total project, not restricted to classrooms during specified periods. A true teacher took responsibility for his or her students' physical, moral, social and intellectual well-being. For Wilson, being a true teacher was at the core of his sense of self. He thought of himself as a teacher first and foremost. Much of his parenting, as we have already seen, was pedagogical in nature, and when he had retired from teaching and was serving in the Senate, he still referred to himself as a teacher. In his view he was a teacher serving as senator, and it was when he was speaking as a teacher that his speeches had the strongest air of authority.

#### Davuilevu and the Rotuman Hostel

He began his career as an educator shortly after his 15th birthday, on December 1st, 1923, at Davuilevu Training Institute, and was actively engaged in teaching until 1970, when he assumed the responsibilities of being Rotuma's only representative in the Fiji Legislature. But true to his encompassing notion of education, his teaching was never confined to a classroom. As soon as he was able, he served in the role of surrogate parent to younger generations of students, and had a profound impact on many of them. Wilson organized a special hostel for Rotuman students at Davuilevu and supervised it closely. Hanfiro Kitione, who went on to become a teacher, told of his experience at Davuilevu. His characterization provides insight into the general school climate that formed Wilson's approach to teaching, as well as the significance of the hostel for Rotuman students.

Just before the end of my first year in school, in 1936, my parents moved to Davuilevu, near Suva. My father was sent there by the Methodist Church to undergo a theological course. I entered the Davuilevu Primary School. I found school quite different there from what I had experienced in Rotuma. Perhaps because the teachers there were mission teachers, and had a very friendly approach to teaching. They were very understanding. One was a European lady and the rest were Fijian teachers. I was placed in the first grade, under the care of a male Fijian teacher, and I found him very much to my liking. I spent six years

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at this school. For the first three years I stayed with my parent and there were very few changes because I could always go home after school. The main drawback during this time was language, because teaching was mostly in Fijian. Once I mastered the language — which did not take very long — I found my way about in school and with the other children in the community...

At the end of 1939 my parents returned to Rotuma, after my father completed his course. I was left to live with Rotuman boys. They had a separate hostel there, more or less organized by Wilson Inia. Then I realized the change. I suppose my life seemed empty with both my parents gone. But since the boys were all Rotumans, and Wilson was there to look after us, it didn't take me long to adjust — about a month or two. The new “family” was quite an interesting one. There were 21 of us. We had a head boy (prefect) and we had to plant to feed ourselves, apart from the money our parents used to send over. This money was kept by Inia. Organization was very good at that time. We were all looked after. He was very careful about how our money was used and he made sure that none of the boys ran out of money; once a boy would run out [Wilson] would inform his parents and get them to send more. We looked upon him as someone who represented our parents, especially in a far away country.

Life in that little dormitory was...very well organized. We used to work on the plantation very early in the morning — six to half-past seven, and then go to school after that. After school at three o'clock we would go back home and again go to the plantation from 4 to 5 o'clock. After that we would shower and have our dinner. In the evenings we had study time, compulsory, from around 7 to 9 o'clock. That was the schedule on Mondays through Fridays. On Saturdays we washed our clothes and maybe went to the movies if we had the funds. On Sunday we went to church and Sunday School. I liked going to church and Sunday Schools then. I lived with these boys for two years like this.

At the end of 1940 Wilson went [away]...and we were left on our own. Things became very badly disorganized then, particularly on the financial side. There was not one to look after it; each boy had to look after his own [money]. He returned in 1941, but unfortunately he got sick and was laid up in the hospital. When he recovered he went to Rotuma for a holiday, and because of the disorganization, most of the boys left, but I stayed, along with three others. Eighteen of the boys left and went to look for jobs. I was too young to go and look for a job then. I was thinking that I would wait until the following year — 1942 — and would go to Suva then and try to see what I could do about a job.

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But in 1942, fortunately, one of my uncles came to Davuilevu to take the theological course, and my parents suggested that I stay with him and his wife. I noticed a great change in life from the hostel to this family. He was rather harsh in his ways, and I found life very hard living with him, because I had to work hard, doing planting and hard jobs to please him (Field Notes, 1960).

Although he was a firm taskmaster and kept close watch on the students' expenditures, he was far from stingy. Elisapeti remembered his generosity. She recalled how Faga Panapasa, a schoolmate of hers who became a physician, would come and take food from the cupboard, which was out on the verandah and easily accessible. Other boys did the same when they were hungry and out of food. Sometimes Wilson would come home and find the cupboard completely empty, but he never complained or took steps to make the food inaccessible.

In 1942 Wilson returned to Rotuma on sick leave to recuperate from an operation. He took the opportunity to provide assistance to the schools in Rotuma. He took over as temporary Headmaster of the Motusa School for the month of June, taught at the Malhaha School during July and at Paptea during August. He repeated this cycle from September through November, thus spending two months in each school. This gave him an opportunity to identify the most promising students, and he took several of them back to Fiji to coach for an entrance examination to Queen Victoria School, one of Fiji's premier educational institutions. Three of the group passed the exam and went on to successful professional careers.

It would not be too much to say that nearly the entire first generation of Rotuman teachers, and a significant portion of Rotumans who went into other professions, were indebted to Wilson Inia in one way or another. He not only taught them, and kept them in school by looking after their practical needs, he served as a model of what a poor child from Rotuma could become.

### Headmaster

In 1947, at the age of 39, Wilson was rewarded for his years of teaching service by appointment as Headmaster at the Methodist Mission's Richmond School on the island of Kadavu. Richmond, like Davuilevu, was primarily a boarding school and Wilson was like a surrogate parent to all the students. He was not only a teacher, but a doctor (he had passed an exam in first aid two years before, and there were no resident physicians nearby), counsellor, carpenter, plumber, handyman and for the first time, husband and father.

In 1953 the Methodist Mission in Fiji granted Wilson a year's furlough on Rotuma, with the suggestion that he teach in one of the Rotuman schools during this time. They were then to return to Kadavu, but the people on Rotuma had other ideas. As Elisapeti tells it:

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We came back to Rotuma in 1953 on furlough — the synod allowed us to come for a holiday — and while we were here Fred Ieli and the seven chiefs decided that a high school should be started. One day all the chiefs came with a koua ‘sacrificial pig cooked in an earthen oven’ and asked if we would stay. I cried and said I wanted to go home. Wilson replied, “Home? Where?”

I said, “Richmond.”

He said, “This is your home.”

Wilson was disposed to accept the challenge, but only if Elisapeti would agree. In the end she did agree, but only “through tears.” Kadavu had been good to them; it was their first home together, the birthplace of their first two children. But for Wilson the opportunity to give service to his own people was a calling too strong to resist.

Arrangements were made, and Wilson was appointed Headmaster of the Malhaha District School. At the time the school included classes 1 through 6, but it was expanded to include grades 7 and 8 following his appointment. In order for the school to qualify for a teacher with a class 2 certificate, which Wilson held, it needed a larger enrollment, so 25 students were transferred from the Motusa School to Malhaha. Elisapeti taught class 7, where she laughingly related she was supposed to “break” the students, and Wilson taught class 8. Their goal was to prepare students for the qualifying examinations that were prerequisites for more advanced schooling.

Malhaha School was one of five on the island at the time. Two of these were Catholic schools, under supervision of the Catholic Education Secretary, operating out of the Bishop’s office in Suva. One of these, at the Sumi Mission station, was a primary school only, going up to class 8. The other, at Upu Mission station, included a secondary school for boys up through Form IV, as well as primary section. Upu provided the only opportunity for secondary education on Rotuma, but was restricted to Catholic boys. Catholic girls and Methodists had to leave the island if they were to receive education beyond the eighth grade. The other two schools were located at Motusa and Paptea (see map). Malhaha, Motusa and Paptea schools were funded partially by the Colonial Government and partially by funds raised locally by the Rotuma Council through a voluntary one shilling deduction on every basket of green copra cut by Methodists. The District Officer, who was appointed by the Governor of Fiji, was officially the Manager of all three government-supported schools, but in fact management was the responsibility of local committees composed of the chiefs and sub-chiefs from each school district. The committees were supposed to meet quarterly and were charged with seeing to it that practical matters such as maintenance of the school buildings were dealt with satisfactorily. If work needed to be done on a school it was up to the chiefs to organize the labour.

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The first order of business for Wilson and Elisapeti was to improve conditions at the school, which required getting the support of the chiefs in the school district and mobilizing the local community. This was no small feat, however, since the school committees had been largely inactive for some time, and there was much inertia to overcome. Local feuds and mistrust often undermined even the most benevolent projects, and in the interests of avoiding open conflict the committees would simply avoid meetings altogether. But Wilson had been free of these parochial squabbles and quickly gained the support of the Malhaha School Committee. The territory covered by the Malhaha School District included much of the north shore of Rotuma: the Hapmak section of Itu'ti'u district, all of Malhaha district, and the Lopta section of Oinafa district. Labour for constructing new buildings was divided accordingly, with additional assistance from the Methodist-dominated districts of Itu'muta, Noatau and Itu'ti'u.

Before the year was out construction was started on a new school building (by the men from Malhaha), two dormitories (one by the men from Itu'ti'u, the other by the men from Oinafa and Noa'tau), a dining room and kitchen (by the men from Itu'muta and Itu'ti'u) and living quarters for the Headmaster and his family (by the men of Malhaha and Lopta). The District Officer's Annual Report for 1954 includes the comment:

It is noteworthy to praise the initiative of my predecessor and Wilson Inia, Headmaster of Malhaha School, in their determination to encourage the men of the Methodist Mission in Rotuma to achieve this great and important task of constructing a more advanced central school at Malhaha.

The following year's report provides even stronger testimony to Wilson's influence on the general community with regard to education.

The Rotumans have begun to realise the value of education and they have gone through great efforts in improving their schools. They have spent enormous sums, their own money, on erecting new school buildings and contributions towards Government Teachers' salaries.

The Central High School was opened at Malhaha in February, 1958 on the same campus as the Malhaha Primary School, with Wilson Inia as Headmaster. He had been promoted to a rank of Class 1 Teacher in January 1955, and on June 25th, 1957 was made a Class 1 Master. Wilson continued to teach the 8th grade, even after the High School was opened. He recruited two of his earlier students to teach Forms III and IV: Aisea Aitu and Hanfiro Kitione. Both had been abroad for advanced teacher training. Whenever Wilson went to Suva he would attempt to persuade all the best Rotuman teachers — including such outstanding individuals as Harieta



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Katafono, Lavenia Kaurasi, and Rigamoto Taito — to serve for a period on their home island. He was largely successful, much to the advantage of Rotuman students.

### Teaching Strategies

Wilson was an exceptional teacher. His former students frequently describe him as “the best teacher I ever had.” Reverend Jione Lagi began a conversation with that statement, and went on to reflect that, “If it weren’t for Wilson Inia I don’t know where I’d be; probably back home with 6 or 7 kids.” Lagi described his mentor’s teaching methods as “very simple,” comparing him favorably with others who administered harsh, often arbitrary punishment. “Some of the other teachers were really rough,” he recalled; “they would whack kids unnecessarily and would pound a ruler on the desk. The kids were not thinking of the answer, but which way to dodge.”

He recalled one instance in which he did receive punishment, but in retrospect at least, regarded it as well-deserved.

One day I didn’t complete my homework — we had 60 sums to do and I only did 56. Wilson noticed it when he passed by my desk and asked the students who had finished all their homework to stand up. I stood up and Wilson came to look. About 10 of those standing hadn’t finished. “How could you do that to me?” Wilson asked me. “What about your father & grandfather? How can you not speak the truth to me?” As punishment we had to spend time levelling the schoolground, which was under construction, by pulling a used railway tie across the earth. The boys pulled the ties from a harness, like oxen, and the girls had to carry stones. My mother brought my lunch to school and saw me. When I got home my father gave me a “hiding” and told me I had to go to apologize to Master Inia.

Reverend Lagi said that all of Wilson’s students wanted to be like him because he practiced what he preached. “His honesty was inspiring. He wrote monthly aphorisms on the blackboard, including sayings like, ‘Manners makes the man,’ and ‘Honesty is the best policy.’”

As in all other aspects of his life, Wilson was a well-organized classroom teacher. His main goal was to prepare students for the exams they would have to pass to be eligible for further education, an aim that was reflected in his lesson plans. He also crystallized his teaching strategy into a set of ten maxims which he taught to other teachers, including Elisapeti. She summarized them as follows:

1. Base your teaching on the child and follow nature.
2. Teach through the senses.
3. Proceed from the concrete to the abstract.

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4. Proceed from the known to the unknown.
5. Proceed from the simple to the complex.
6. Teach inductively.
7. Let the children observe and reason; have them memorise only if the information is worth memorising.
8. Don't tell them what they can readily find out for themselves.
9. Let the children learn by doing.
10. Make all your lessons interesting and attractive.

Teaching Rotuman children to pass exams set by New Zealand examiners, the case during the colonial period, was quite a challenge. Not only did the students have to overcome language problems (the exams were in English), but they had to learn European-oriented history, geography and social studies. There were no laboratory facilities for teaching science. Elisapeti elaborated on the steps she and Wilson developed to cope with such difficulties.

Step 1: Ask a few questions at the beginning of the lesson to prepare the children's minds for the new subject. Because it is difficult for them to learn anything completely new, link each new idea to an old one.

Step 2: After refreshing the children's minds with some familiar ideas on which they can connect the new ones, present the new ideas to them. But if they are simply told everything they are likely to forget by the following week. That would be of very little value in developing their powers. The "telling" method may be good for the lower grades, but with older children the "finding out" method is best. Of course they must be told something which is too difficult for them to find out, if questions fail to lead them to the facts. In this presentation step, questions help them to reason out some facts; demonstration is important, and teaching aids help to make instruction more effective. [Elisapeti commented that because of limited funds, teachers had to rely on a few pictures cut from magazines and maps drawn by hand on brown paper.]

Step 3: Lastly, the children are required to do something with the ideas presented to them. No impression without expression. The children answer oral revision questions, draw something from the lesson such as a map or diagram, or retell the story.

Wilson was not disposed to suppress self-assertive behaviour, even though it may have caused occasional disruptions in the classroom. Rather he attempted to find constructive outlets for it, such as putting assertive children in charge of certain activities, or giving them special jobs to do. But he did impose rules, such as not lying to the teacher, that had to be obeyed under threat of

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punishment. He had been taught in schools in which corporal punishment was commonplace, and used it on occasion, as he did when he used his belt on Betty in front of the school assembly. But it was not a punishment he relished. He considered it to be effective as a threat, so using it occasionally made it possible to be less punitive in the long run. More often he imposed arduous tasks such as levelling the playground or removing rocks. In fact he seems to have relied more on incentives for controlling students' behaviour than he did on threats of punishment. He made sure to praise good performances, and even good attempts that failed. Good students were rewarded with privileges, such as being made monitors or prefects.

Wilson was more than a teacher to his students. He was mentor and counsellor; he provided guidance when it came to career decisions. This was not always easy, because each student's circumstances had to be taken into account. Ambitions had to be matched with realities. And perhaps as important, each Rotuman student sent abroad reflected on the community as a whole, on the reputation of the schools, his or her family, and the Rotuman people. Reverend Lagi recalled the circumstances of his decision to go into the ministry, and the role Wilson played as counsellor.

In 1959 I took the Fiji Junior exam and was one of 3, out of 7 who sat for the exam, who passed. At that point in time the Fiji Junior had replaced the Junior Cambridge, and was a ticket to teachers' training college, a good paying job in Suva, and so forth. I had already been accepted to Nasinu Teacher's Training College, following an interview with Mr. Hammond. Everyone thought it was all set for me to go and become a teacher. But I decided I wanted to become a minister and went to talk to Wilson about it. He asked me if I had come to find out the results of the Fiji Junior exam, but I said, "No, I want to go to Bible School." Wilson told me this was not a good idea, that Bible School is very difficult and requires a great deal of sacrifice. He told me it would be much better to go to Teacher's College, or even to go out and get a job, that I could get a good job having passed the exam and would earn lots of money. But this was just Wilson's way of testing me, and when I insisted I wanted to go to Bible School, Wilson shook my hand and embraced me, and told me he would approve if I got permission from my parents.

I didn't go to tell my parents, though, because I was afraid of how they would respond. I went to my mother's mother's place in Malhaha — she was blind — and stayed there until the boat was about to come to take the students to Fiji. When the farewell service was held in Malhaha, Wilson read the list of students who were going to schools in Fiji. When he announced those going to

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Nasinu, he did not announce my name. My mother turned to me — I was singing in the choir — and gave me a quizzical look. Finally Wilson announced that one young man had come to see him in his office and wanted to go to Bible College, and that this thrilled his heart. He told the congregation that he tried to talk the young man out of it but he wants to go, and he's here in the choir, and then gave my name. My mother gave me a real stern look.

I hurried out after the service with a friend and we rode our bikes away, to Itu'muta, to avoid my mother. We carried baskets of watermelon on our bikes to take them for an *ag forau* 'farewell party' being held in Itu'muta. We stayed up playing cards until 3:30 in the morning and then went to another *ag forau* in Malhaha and played cards until 5 a.m. Finally, my mother's brother came to fetch me and took me to meet with my parents, aunties and uncles. They told me I was not going to Bible School. "You're the one who always wants to eat good food," they told me. "Three Rotumans have already failed because life at Bible School is too hard, there is too little to eat. They ran away. If you do the same it will ruin the family's reputation. Reverend Taito and Kelera (his wife, my mother's sister) will be embarrassed. Your mother will take you to Master Inia this morning to tell him."

My father didn't say a word. Finally, after all had spoken, I said, "Thank you very much for your thoughts, but I've said I'm going and I will. If you won't let me I'll stay here and become a farmer. The only thing that will stop me from finishing Bible School if I go is death." My family cried and told me they were just testing my resolve.

### The Price of Extra-Curricular Activities

In Wilson's view the need for education on Rotuma went beyond the established schools. It also went beyond the established curriculum. The modern world was encroaching on Rotuma, and he believed that people would have to learn to handle money responsibly if they were to adapt successfully. He quickly became involved in the fledgling co-operative movement, and initiated courses in bookkeeping, both at the school and in the evenings for adults. He inaugurated the school course in bookkeeping to the displeasure of the Education Department, as we have seen, since it was not part of the established curriculum. He also was deeply involved in Church affairs. When it came time for an evaluation by the Education Department, these extra-curricular involvements were used as a source of criticism, but it was also difficult for the inspector to ignore Wilson's contributions. The following extracts were taken from a

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“Confidential Inspection Report of Wilson Inia at Malhaha District School,” by M.J. Bay, Assistant Director of Education. The date of inspection April 9-10, 1962.

### 1. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL:

Your long experience has given you an excellent basis on which to organise your school, and you have done this reasonably satisfactorily. You have a flair for organisation and a capacity for leadership, which appears to be directed more to community and to extra curricular activities than it is to your professional work.

Not only the capacity to observe and to analyse individual weaknesses, and the ability to give professional guidance, but the will to do so are essential to the successful administration of a school as large as yours. Without regular and adequate supervision, and direction, your younger teachers will stagnate rather than develop. The development of teaching methods on up to date lines could be pursued with greater vigour.

Improvements to grounds and buildings indicate good relationships with the community. Further suitable extension is planned. The use of the buildings for teachers' meetings is commendable. Greater opportunity could be taken for discussion and demonstration of teaching methods at these gatherings, in which classrooms and teaching organisation and practice in your school could be used as models.

### 2. RELATIONSHIP WITH PUPILS:

Discipline in the school is sound. Training in social relationships is given through Duty Organisation, House Competitions, participation in various celebrations, and through instruction in native custom. The latter needs to be more specific, to follow a definite detailed plan, and to be corroborated with other subjects. Your own classroom atmosphere is one of busy-ness and eagerness to learn. Try to get much more of this in other classrooms by more frequent visits and demonstrations.

[Following some rather serious criticisms of various aspects of school facilities, equipment and practices was a section on:]

### 5. CONTENT AND QUALITY OF THE SCHOOL PROGRAMMEME:

Class 8 standards are good, due solely to your personal teaching ability. Closer observations of all aspects of one subject at a time throughout the school is desirable, with specific instructions on how weaknesses are to be attacked, so that

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the level of attainment may more generally approach that of C.8. For this purpose each assistant should have a Head Teacher's Instruction Book.

### 6. METHODS OF TEACHING:

Your own teaching is generally good, but it appears that you lean rather too heavily on your past experience, and could put a little more time into planning and preparation, to good effect. Pupils respond well in full sentence answers. Recapitulation could be improved.

Morning Talk: satisfactory. More pupil participation at questioning is desirable.

Verb Drills: satisfactory. Group work would make them more effective - especially if extended in sentences.

Eng. Grammar: the explanation of Negative and Affirmative tended to become too long and academic.

Eng. Composition: based on verbs. Good work, well written. Good stress was placed on varied sentences and beginnings. Good individual correction and explanation of errors. Errors were used for Grammar instruction.

Arithmetic: knowledge of content and of methods were both good.

Natural Science: B.B. well used - a few words could have been included with the sketch. Good chart introduced - you talked far too long - a few more questions should have been thrown in - pupils should have been given the opportunity to recapitulate from the summary.

Spelling: it was disappointing to find Note Books left uncorrected.

Bay's concluding comments may reflect the supercilious judgment of a colonial official displeased by an uppity "native" courageous enough to set his own priorities, rather than a dispassionate assessment of the circumstances.

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Although you have done a great deal towards the material progress of Malhaha District School, it was most disappointing to find that you had not put equal effort into the professional side.

Staffing difficulties are realised, but, you have a better staffing ratio of Registered Teachers than any Fiji School of comparable size.

The weaknesses recorded are such as you would no doubt have found out for yourself had you visited classrooms regularly. Most of them are elementary and such as you were warned against in your teacher training and early in your career.

When you have reorganised your Time Table and planned regular visits to classrooms you will realise just how unsatisfactory things are - no better than Motusa and Paptea - in some cases not as good.

I gained the impression that your Church and Co-operative Society activities take pride of place, with professional interests coming a bad third - or even fourth - whereas they should be your first consideration. Any Class One teacher should be a model of teaching efficiency - Teachers in your area look for it. I expect it.

### The Teacher in the Senate

At the first opportunity Wilson Inia established himself as a spokesman for education in the Legislature of newly independent Fiji. In his second speech, on December 17, 1970, he addressed a number of educational issues that were to occupy his attention throughout his legislative career. His speech was in response to a plan for national development, which had much in it that pleased him. He began by congratulating the Government for having the courage to spend so much on education, then went on to convey his personal views regarding priorities.

I come from a very little island. Because there was so little money in [times past] we had to go into education without any money at all [from the colonial government]... [T]he Rotuma Council spent between 80 [and] 90 percent [of their total revenues on education] from the day they first had these funds up till today. They believe that to exist, to live, and to live well side by side with all their fellowmen of this dominion, education must never be neglected.

I wish to touch on a few points...that make it an excellent plan. Firstly, it is [the emphasis on] the teacher. If you have great buildings but a poor teacher the result will be very poor. If you have a good teacher but an old wooden building or one thatched with coconut leaves, or sago plant leaves over your head,

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you are [still] sure to have good results. One of the great things that I see in this plan is the strong attempt that is being made today to [train] very good teachers inside this dominion [at] good teacher training colleges... [I]f you can...provide incentive for bringing in good teachers then you are sure [of] success. I wish to congratulate the Education Department in doing their very best by trying to get good teachers for this dominion. Good teachers for our rural areas are not very easy to get. When you leave the limelight of the centre of civilisation you do not look forward to going out into the rural areas. You need dedicated men and women to go that far. That is one of the great problems that we in the rural areas always have to put up with; we find it very difficult to get good teachers because we have not got the money. I must congratulate the government for increasing the help given to the schools, especially to schools throughout the dominion and particularly to those in rural areas (Senate speech December 17, 1970).

He reviewed with gratitude the steady increases in Government support for education over the years, from 50 percent to 60, 75, 90 and finally 100 percent support for Government-operated primary schools, but expressed concern that secondary schools received considerably less — only 60 per cent of operating expenses. This, he reminded his fellow legislators, severely disadvantaged rural communities. Given the relatively high salaries of secondary school teachers, communities like Rotuma would have to rely on foreign volunteers such as VSOs, VSAs and Peace Corps, a mixed blessing as far as Wilson was concerned since they might be culturally insensitive and introduce new, possibly disruptive, behaviours. He also lamented the absence of bureaucratic know-how in Rotuma, which made it difficult to solicit financial support for improvements to facilities and equipment.

Also deserving of praise in his opinion were plans to centralise classes 7 (Form I) and 8 (Form II) with Forms III and IV, since this would facilitate preparation for passing standardized examinations, particularly the Fiji Junior. He also believed it would result in a better education for slower students, since when classes are scattered in different schools there is less opportunity to provide for their special needs. Given the great emphasis on passing standardized exams it was quite natural for teachers to focus their efforts on the brighter students, those with the best chance of passing. Centralisation, by bringing together a greater concentration of students, would allow for alternate tracks, so that individual teachers are no longer faced with the dilemma of choosing to devote attention to the top or the bottom end of a class.

If [a teacher] devoted too much of his attention to the bottom end, the top one will play up and will be very angry, and perhaps you will not get a lot of passes. If he devoted his attention to the top end, the bottom end will never get



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anything. They will lose interest and a lot of trouble is caused in this way (Senate speech December 17, 1970).

He found proposed curriculum changes equally praiseworthy, especially the substitution of Fiji-based examinations for those prepared in New Zealand, and the local production of text-books. In the past teachers were required to find texts from New Zealand, often unsuccessfully since they were both expensive and scarce.

As if to reinforce his credentials and image as a teacher, he then brought up what he considered one of the main problems impeding the educational progress of children — the neglect of homework!

This is something that we in the rural schools find very difficult, not only to tell the children but to try and pass on to the parents, that when tea is over, about half an hour should be devoted to sitting down and doing their set homework, especially with the standard of education getting higher and higher today in our secondary schools. Children and parents are used to the primary school standard, the classes 1 and 2. When school is over for the day, there is no homework. Some even do not have anything to carry home. When tea is over they either play around or sit down and sing. We have now reached secondary schools and in order to do justice to the education that has come into rural areas, great care must be taken to see that all the homework set for the next day's work is correctly done at home. This is something that parents in rural areas do not do and it will take a very long time to correct this big mistake. You may have good teachers, good buildings, but if the homework and home study of all these schools are not properly done, poor results will be the final outcome (Senate speech December 17, 1970).

Another problem he mentioned were teachers who drank, and who served as negative models for their students. "All our eggs are in one basket," he said, and if the wrong teachers are sent, "if the basket is wrongly tipped, all of Rotuma will disappear under the ocean."

### Compulsory education

In Wilson's view education was the key to future of the new dominion, and when a bill making schooling compulsory was introduced he supported it enthusiastically, with the caution that commitment had to be strong, so that support services such as bussing could be provided as well as first class schools. As it so often did in his speeches, Rotuma provided an example.

The Rotumans have always regarded the education of their children as the most important thing in life. This I think is quite true in that the greatest asset

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owned by any country or nation is not so much gold or great industries, but it is the children of the country. This is the greatest asset in any country. Why? Well, these will be the owners of everything in the days to come. They will be the owners of all the gold and the businesses that you have been talking about and wanting to bring about. If we do not prepare these new future owners well in life, there will be a terrible mess of all these things that you seem to think have a very high priority in the life of men.

Every time the Rotuma Council presents its estimates for the new year, there is always this criticism from the Ministry of Finance that it is lopsided — too much on the educational side and less on other developments. However, it is the Rotuman's mind and we stick to that estimate. Because of that it plays a very important part in the educational system of our little island.

In the dark days when our people did not know of the value of education, Government had to make education compulsory in order to make the parents send the child to school rather than keep the girl to look after the baby, while the mother goes out fishing; or the father keeps the young man...when he goes to the bush and help him in the gardens. The more girls and boys you have, the greater the assistance the couple will have at home. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why...it is very difficult to control family planning in Rotuma.

[T]he solution is in compulsory education, but then if you try and introduce compulsory education, you have to make it the best possible...and no parent must bring up complaints to say they cannot get bus fares so the child cannot go to school (Senate speech July 1, 1976).

### The plight of secondary education and teacher training

Wilson was particularly concerned with the neglect of secondary education in rural areas of Fiji, and urged greater Government involvement in funding schools and training teachers. Unless policies were changed, he believed, the discrepancies between urban and rural standards of living would increase, accentuating existing problems.

[T]he trend in the Fijian post primary education is dangerous. It is going downwards... One of the reasons [is] finance... For several years I had the experience of running a secondary school down south in Kadavu. It was just about to close down because of finance. And to put it right [we had] to find finance; bump up the school fees — shocking. Unfortunately, with secondary schools you have to bring children from several parts of Kadavu and put them

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together in one spot, which [requires] a boarding school. Who is going to feed them? If they had stayed at home like several urban schools here and walked or paid three cents to go to the school, it would be very much better. But with those of us who are out in the islands, if you want to raise the standard of secondary education, you will have to come up against the big problem of finding, not only money to build the buildings, but you have to find money to pay the salaries of all the teachers. Good teachers are not very easy to find, they are very expensive. Added to that, you have got to look after the school children as boarders. And worse still, you might have a mixed school, where you have males and females. These are some of the very delicate situations that one will have to come up against if one were to try and introduce a secondary school out in rural areas, especially out in the islands... [W]here many people are grouped together in a town or a city, you could have a very big attendance and things could be cheaper, and if school fees are to be paid, they could be less, whereas out in the islands you may have five, six, ten or fifteen villages combined together to have one secondary school; the number cannot be very big. And therefore, per head, [schooling] is a very expensive thing, and very heavy on the shoulders of the parents...; it would be very...difficult for them to keep up with...those who live in urban areas...

This is not something...new. This is one of the reasons why several of us who, not being satisfied with the secondary education that we received out in the islands for our children, brave the seas to send our children over here to be educated in towns and cities... You might try and get into a big secondary school, but then there is always the answer, "Sorry, it's full, no vacancies." Those who are near get in first; those of us who are far [are put] right down the tail-end of the list...

[W]hoever is going to try and solve this [problem] must give a strong helping hand to those of us who are out in areas where it is not very easy to provide a good secondary school, [one] that could compare quite favourably with any that is round about Suva... And unless the same opportunity is given to us out in the rural areas...you will always have us lagging behind... I would like to point out...that [though] your education here would be...high, you will always be ashamed...that we who have not been given the same opportunity would [be] present in years to come, if our children should mix with yours. It is along these lines...that I would like to emphasise the importance of financial help given to the

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secondary schools that are making a very strong attempt...to raise their heads above water today.

Another very difficult problem is the school teachers—teachers in secondary schools. There [are] not enough good secondary school teachers today. We [also] have great difficulty with the primary school teachers; we have to ask some school leavers to come in and be part-time teachers, untrained, to [try and] put the primary section right... I always regard untrained teachers as a big headache... You might as well do without them. It is better to combine two classes under one qualified teacher than to have one badly trained primary school leaver taking over in order to fill the gap... It is true...that it is part of the [head teacher's work] to give a helping hand to train this teacher, but that is only good on paper; [it has] never been practised. And because of that, this young teacher, who does not know very much about the proper way of doing things...is going to cause a lot of trouble in the years to come... [Such teachers are told,] “You come in, teach for a little while [and] at the end of the year we [will] send you over to NTC [Nasinu Training College] to be trained.” If that could be done it might help, but I know of some who have waited for several years without having this help (Senate speech July 15, 1974).

### The notion of a properly educated person

Wilson also felt that education had to be of the right kind. If properly educated, people would know how to get on with others and harmony would reign; if they were mis-educated the results could be disastrous.

I feel...that in order to accomplish and maintain true harmony in this country of ours, this education that we have been emphasising...all along for over 100 years now, is very important. However, there is a right education and a wrong one. The right one, simply put, would be one that brings about plenty of harmony, love, tolerance; the wrong one brings about covetousness, strife, exploitation — things that would destroy harmony in this country. It is also said that with true education a person is gentle, not rude, there is a polite or a courteous way to disagree with somebody who does not think like you. True education tends to do just what several males used to do in our buses here in Fiji; when an old lady [gets on], the man will stand up and step aside for the old lady to sit down. Only true education could do that. With wrong education the man would sit there stubbornly and refuse to budge an inch for this old lady.

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Similarly, with anyone who is properly educated, in the correct sense that I am emphasising today, the English language [he uses (if he is speaking in English)], is simple...—none of these...long, long words where one [has to refer to] the dictionary every time [he] rises to speak. [Mis-educated people] seem to think that the more long words they use, the more highly they would be regarded...Anyone who speaks that way is badly educated...The true type of education, the education that will bring about...harmony [is based upon] simple English...the ability to say: “Yes, this is a matter of opinion; I think this way, you think that way. Perhaps you are right, perhaps you are wrong.” Only a truly educated man could say, “perhaps I may be wrong and you are right” (Senate speech November 18, 1975).

Proper education made one into a gentleman or gentlewoman, Wilson believed, and those who had not been lucky enough to receive such training should not be faulted. When some of his colleagues vented their irritation over the disruptive antics of striking dock workers he chided them for lack of understanding.

Let me remind the House that the history of education is something that belonged only to the rich and never to the poor. And it is only through the godliness of several men and women in this world that the common people like myself have been given free education.

Another important point... if you wish to bring about harmony between the rich and poor...get them to love one another. It has been said...that through education you can make a person gentle and the one who is not properly educated is a little bit, shall we say, mischievous. We can pick him out very quickly in a crowd.

I listened very carefully today...[to criticisms of the] trade union and I would like to...beg the House to excuse them because the majority of them are not well educated. The majority of them...working down at the wharf or sweeping the streets have never had an education like we had to gentle them (Senate speech June 30, 1976).

### The right kind of education for Fiji

Wilson was not simply an idealist when it came to education. This reflected one part of his educator’s mentality — the philosophical and one might rightfully say, spiritual side. The other side was pure practicality. He was deeply concerned about the consequences of an education system geared solely toward producing elite leaders and white-collar workers. “Education

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should fit children for the life in the country where they are going to live,” he asserted, and “the curriculum is the compass whereby...teachers steer their ship” (Senate speech March 26, 1980). He argued for recognizing the different needs of urban and rural areas.

In my days...the curriculum was geared...to produce great leaders... But is it right to continue this curriculum up till today? ... Even we in Rotuma did our very best to get into the very best schools that Government can provide here in Fiji...

[I]f you want to produce a curriculum to fit the people in the urban areas it must be biased towards jobs which produce employees inside that city. But if you wish to produce a curriculum to fit those of us who are out in rural areas and in the islands, then I am quite sure it can not be the same as the one produced here in Suva. It must fit us so that we go back and use the soil (Senate speech March 26, 1980).

He pointed to the problems of urban unemployment and underemployment that had arisen in Fiji, to the large numbers of graduates who could not find gainful employment, or had to accept jobs for which they were overqualified. And he lamented the fact that people had been given the impression that the only channel for success was through advanced education in the liberal arts to the professions or white collar jobs in the city. Culpability for such an unfortunate situation lay with an education system striving to emulate the more developed countries.

[E]ach year we seem to be having from about 6,000 to 10,000 school leavers looking for jobs and we have no jobs. Why do they only want jobs in cities and towns? As teachers, we can do nothing to stop them. Why? It is because the schools in Fiji are geared in such a way that people end up...wanting white-collar jobs. I put the blame on the educational system of our country, [which] is set up along the Western line. We will always have thousands of unemployed at the end of every year. How many thousands would want to go back and help their fathers on the farm? I would say none at all...

The way our education system is set up is going to increase the problem of the unemployed. Such a system is all right for a country where...secondary industry is very high and can take in a lot of these school leavers. But if you take a look at the secondary industries here, you will find there are not many and those few can only take a small number of people, whilst several thousands will finish up in the streets, or with relatives, or in the little houses in Raiwaqa, which are designed only for one family. Just go and visit them at night and you will find that the floor is full because they all sleep on the floor.

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There is no...easy solution... The blame seems to be pushed on to the curriculum people, and we are still waiting for the new curriculum that is going to be formulated so that when the students finish school, they will be able to find employment. I know one very important employment and that is using the land. If we cannot gear the education system of our country in such a way that it is possible to give employment to students in rural areas, the headache will go on forever... I have been criticised for making such a suggestion and was nearly sacked because I never believed that the education system was good for Rotuma. I saw that it would be wrong and I altered it in such a way that it annoyed the Education Department very much. But I told them that their students will end up in the city of Suva unemployed and mine would end up here in Rotuma as farmers (Senate speech December 20, 1977).

To correct these problems Fiji, being primarily an agricultural country, should incorporate training for agriculture into the educational curriculum, and include it in the early grades, so the country could use its resources — human and natural — wisely.

I feel that the children of today should be taught to have an interest in the use of land. [If it is also] the wish...of the Government to fit quite a lot of our people to rural life then it cannot be done at the tail-end of their educational life, it must be done early. It must begin from class 1, but not after Form 4 level when the child has failed Fiji Junior and is then invited to join the post-Form 4 class — [a] special class prepared to fit these children to rural life...(Senate speech July 1, 1976).

He bemoaned the tendency in schools to treat manual labour, including agriculture, as so tedious and demeaning that it served as a form of punishment for school children.

I believe the present practice...that whenever there is punishment to be meted out to somebody who has broken the school rules, the child is sent out to cut grass on the playground or in the school garden. If you have to do this sort of thing, would the children love the school garden, and love to cut grass? If the punished child has got a white uniform like the students of Indian High School opposite where I live, and he is sent out to cut grass on a wet day how is he going to avoid not dirtying his white uniform? Nobody would like that sort of thing. It is only natural that in the end school children would never love agriculture. This is a bad practice. If it is the aim of our education to frighten the school children from using the soil you are succeeding very well, but if it is the other way round

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then I think quite a lot of things have got to be changed (Senate speech July 1, 1976).

Indeed, one reason Wilson was so enthusiastic about centralising secondary school education was because it would make possible the establishment of a rural-oriented track for students who did not do well in liberal studies. He envisioned the implications for Rotuma thusly:

[A]ll classes seven and eight in Rotuma are going to combine in one school, and the Rotuma Council, which for years has been transporting all the school children free, will continue to do so. This means that we will have very big forms 1 to 4, and in each form, you can easily break them up into streams — three streams (a), (b) and (c). In this new set-up there is no need to sit an entrance examination; in this new junior secondary school, you simply just come from class 6 and continue on to class 7 and there is no stepping-stone whereby the bad ones are kicked out and only the good ones are taken in. They all come in. With the three streams you can have your (a) providing the future leaders, an academic training would suit them very well. With (b) and (c), particularly (c), it would be a very silly thing to try and teach them algebra. They would continue at their slow rate and of course, if their brains are not very fast to retain things, surely their hands could be used to a greater degree. Stream (c) could be diverted to use the skills of their hands to fit them with Rotuma, with the country, and when they leave school, though they may not be able to become supervisors of a great building construction, yet they could become good handy men and women. The suggested subjects that were asked to be taught: firstly, we continue with the old technical subjects, that is, to make furniture and to build houses that would fit in with rural areas; modern science, cooking and sewing — perhaps not so much the type of dress that would suit great Suva where there is hardly anything below, but one that would suit country areas; continue with bookkeeping and business practice; and introduce modern and Rotuman agriculture inside the school. I say modern and Rotuman agriculture. You have to convince the Rotuman that his way of keeping pigs is not a good one, the modern one is better... [O]nly if we see the modern one is better than the old one, [will] we follow it. This has got to be done in the school for the citizens of tomorrow to see with their own eyes.

Now, in the new junior secondary school, the school will have a farm of its own and practical agriculture will be taught as a subject inside the school as well as outside. It grieves me very much...to learn that Rotuman children these days, particularly in the secondary schools, are unwilling to dirty [their] hands — they



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prefer a lawnmower to do the job for them. I hope...that in the new set-up, they will learn the dignity of labour and the importance of the land, and unless they are taught while they are young, they will never make use of the land (Senate speech December 18, 1973).

Wilson's concern for appropriate education led him to question the value of the very certificates he worked so hard preparing students to attain. The School Certificate Examinations were tests of students' academic knowledge and abilities, and they discriminated against those whose education stressed practical knowledge. Yet the certificates had become the major criterion for gaining access to advanced schooling, and for securing employment, especially in the cities. This, Wilson believed, resulted in injustice. When the Senate was confronted with grievances from students who had passed the Fiji Junior Exams with a grade of "C", but were not accepted by secondary schools for further education, he voiced his doubts.

I...wish to point out...the fallacy of examinations being the yardstick whereby we try and measure the ability of a person. Fortunately teachers of old schools who emphasise examinations are fast dying out, and one of them, [myself,] is standing [before you]...

[T]he trend today is to try and do away with [the Secondary School's Entrance Examination], or if there is to be such an examination, it is to pick out the clever ones and give them assistance whereby they can be given free places in the next form. I support this very strongly because who would be bold enough to say that because a child did not pass a written examination he is dull and could not go on to the next class. We cannot adequately measure the ability of a student from theoretical examinations. Very often people have aptitudes for cooking, sewing, typing, shorthand, carpentry, metal work, engineering, or bookkeeping, and these aptitudes are just as important as the ability to speak and write fluently (Senate speech March 28, 1973).

Even at the university level — specifically at the University of the South Pacific — he was concerned that the liberal arts would be overemphasized at the expense of more practical instruction. In response to a Senate bill for increasing the number of scholarships at USP, he remarked:

[A]s for increasing the number of scholarships for students wishing to enter the University of the South Pacific, I would like to say this — when you go into something, you must make sure that when you finish the course there is a job for you to do... What about getting students to graduate with a Bachelor of

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Agriculture or Science rather than Arts. That should fill the bill. Not many seem to like that. Even in Rotuma which is a very small island, yet if you take a trip through the central part of Rotuma you will still find a lot of land lying idle and not being used... I would humbly ask [those responsible] to concentrate more on the middle level and not so much on the top level, because I feel that the requirement of our country is more in the middle level than at the top level (Senate speech April 2, 1979).

Ultimately, however, although he personally believed that schools in the rural areas should concentrate more on agriculture, he was wary of pressuring students, or of depriving them of opportunities. It would be unfair, he asserted, to tell a rural student to forget about being a doctor: "I think it would be totally wrong to refuse students from rural areas in trying to enter the Fiji School of Medicine" (Senate speech March 26, 1980). People should be given the opportunity to choose, and the schools should offer a curriculum that allows them to realise their potential, whatever it might be. He used this argument to urge greater support for teaching science in the rural areas.

### Education, language and culture

Sorting out the value of non-indigenous innovations concerned Wilson in other ways. He was deeply concerned that modern, formal education would overwhelm the native cultures of Fiji, with harmful effects. He saw the traditional cultures as instilling a sense of order that could be jeopardised through educational neglect, so argued strongly for incorporating into curricula the teaching of native custom. The impending loss of customary knowledge was brought home to him in dramatic fashion during a school-related function.

When the Permanent Secretary for education visited Rotuma recently, I was invited to the great gathering but was very disappointed when I discovered that no Rotuman student could perform the ceremony of welcome. It was left to an old teacher to do that, not even a young teacher (Senate speech December 18, 1973).

The issue of custom articulated with that of language, specifically as it concerned the medium of instruction. Here there was a dilemma to be confronted. English had been the medium of instruction in most of the better schools during the colonial period, and it was clear that even following independence English would be Fiji's lingua franca. It was the bridge between Fijian speaking Fijians, Hindi and Urdu speaking Indians, Rotuman speaking Rotumans, Europeans, local Chinese and a variety of Pacific Islanders. English was the language of commerce, governance and diplomacy. When a move was made to establish the English language as the official medium of instruction for government-supported schools Wilson reacted with

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ambivalence. He took the opportunity in his speech on the resulting bill to express his several concerns regarding language and culture.

I come from a rural area where the majority of children in our schools are Rotumans....For messages to be [conveyed] properly, particularly in the junior classes of one to three, it would be best to teach and speak to the students in Rotuman rather than giving them instructions in the English language. I think it would be a great joy if we started speaking in English from class one, but if [you] were to tell children...to bring something the next day, what language would you use? Would you give your instructions in English...or in Rotuman? I think the proper medium of instruction would be in Rotuman...

Where you have schools in the big cities and towns...with a mixed population and mixed classes, I think perhaps English would be the correct medium of instruction to be adopted, but out in the country, I think it should be a different thing altogether. That is why I hesitate when I hear some Members speak of using English as not only a...medium of instruction, but also making it compulsory...

I would like to point out one very [important] aspect of teaching languages; it is not only a matter of talking in that language, but you must be able to write the language, and to be able to write you must be able to spell properly. Those who speak English here in towns speak very well; the country school children admire the fluency of some children from towns, but when the children from the towns sit down to write, you will notice a big difference — they are poor in spelling. So we come to the question of the ability to write the language well.

I feel...that if you want to preserve...peoples' languages, [they must not only] be able to speak it but be able to write it as well. There are several Rotuman children in Suva who have been [taught] in a school where English happens to be the medium of instruction. We sometimes call these schools “English schools,” where they speak English from the time the teacher comes into the classroom until they leave the school. The standard of English is very high..., but I am very sad to say that...they find it very difficult to read the present day Rotuman, because this is a language [with complicated diacritics]. We have five different “a’s”, and it is so difficult that even a Rotuman finds it difficult to read...; if you were to ask the child to write the language it would be almost impossible...

I must thank the Government of Fiji for giving us some sort of autonomy whereby we try and run our schools in such a way so as to be able to preserve the

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Rotuman language as well as the Rotuman culture, rather than be forced to drop Rotuman altogether and adopt something foreign to the people of Rotuma... However...there are some Rotuman parents who prefer to have their children learn English from class 1 and want them to be excellent in English rather than in Rotuman. Why do they wish so much for their children to excel in English? It is only natural that one day the children will get a job and very often the job depends on what standard of English they have. Very often in some examinations the English language is compulsory and if you should pass in the other subjects but you fail in English then they drop you. These are some of the things that would make [some] parents hesitate and think, “Never mind learning about culture and everything, they will never help my child get a job.” [But] when this child gets a job, he has no manners. This is the point...that I would like to emphasise. We have listened to the Attorney-General giving us some alarming figures for years to come when unemployment will be very high, [and] where the standard of selection for jobs would be so high that those who do not pass with high marks will never get a job, and one of the compulsory subjects to pass is English. Customs and cultures are some of the things that very often some parents and some schools sacrifice for the sake of one’s bread and butter in this country of ours...

I would like to say what the Rotuma Council considers about language. Lately, the Rotuma Council found out that a subject was dropped in their schools without their knowledge, which happened to [be] the teaching of Rotuman customs and traditions. Once upon a time it was taught from class one to class eight in primary schools and even in secondary schools. And as students move up to higher classes, vernacular is not given as much emphasis [as it once was]... [L]ately we found...that the children of Rotuma are becoming very naughty and ill-mannered, the cause of which, we feel, is due to the exclusion of teaching Rotuman customs in our primary and secondary schools. When we made inquiries as to why this was stopped, we got the reply that the Education Department refused to give a small allowance to the expert who was supposed to ...teach the subject in school... [C]ustoms and traditions is not an examination subject and because of this the students do not bother. And when the education allowance for the expert did not come forth he dropped out altogether. We have made a very strong effort...to put everything right again, and today the Rotuma Council has made up its mind that if the Education Department is not going to

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come with financial aid, they (the Rotuma Council) will take the subject up from class one to form five level, and this will not only be taught but practised...

[W]e all want to preserve our language and customs, the way of life of our people. It is true that culture does change. You cannot stick to the same one; it will change because it is the way of life agreed upon by the people. Now, if after 50 years people decided and agreed to change something slightly, for example their mode of marriage, it will become part of the Rotuman custom for the time... [B]ut we have to be quite sure about it... [L]et us make sure that we avoid the bad customs and hold on strongly to the good ones. Now, we do have quite a lot of bad...customs...and we should let them go. As it is we have lost quite a lot of our old customs. I personally do not wish to bring them to life again. The best thing to do is [to] let them stay forgotten. We are very happy today...that we no longer eat one another. We have given up our old gods and picked on a new God — one who is better, and we strongly believe that He will not only change the life of a person, but he can also change the life of our country. We are quite sure of that. We have given up some things and taken up new things which we firmly believe was a good choice.

There are some bad things coming in also. Let us make sure that we get rid of them; let us do our very best to stop them. Unfortunately some of them are very powerful... One...is the habit of drinking beer and the powerful Johnny Walker (Whiskey). It will not only ruin the person but it will ruin the country, because this has a very strong hold on the people of this country. This country depends on the people living in it, and if the majority of them are greatly overpowered by this menace, then this wonderful country of ours will suffer in the days to come... [L]et those of us who are old and a bit more mature in our choice help the young people of today to pick wisely, so that when the change does come in, it will not be a bad one, one that we will suffer from (Senate speech June 4, 1979).

### Education and innovation

Although he was a traditionalist in many ways, Wilson valued knowledge over ignorance, even if that knowledge could be used for immoral ends. He therefore favored the introduction of sex education into secondary schools, as part of the teaching of biology. “I cannot see very much difference between reproduction in frogs and reproduction in human beings,” he said. “If you must explain it thoroughly about frogs, then you could do likewise with human beings” (Senate speech June 25, 1973). He chided those who were fearful of telling children about sex

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openly, who would prefer to “let sleeping dogs lie,” or at least wait until the child asks a question, then answer it in private.

I cannot see why, if you [are willing] to answer it privately...you could not explain it fully inside a classroom for the benefit of those who in a few years time will become fathers and mothers and would bring up a family of their own either in ignorance or in the trial and error method, which is not a very good method. You might as well know it thoroughly before having a small family of your own (Senate speech June 25, 1973).

Education was not only for the young, however. Wilson believed that adults needed instruction as well to cope with innovations. That is why he went out of his way to introduce adult bookkeeping classes; bookkeeping was a critical skill if the co-operatives were to be successful. When the proposal was made to replace traditional British imperial system of weights and measures with the metric system, without taking steps to educate adults about its use, Wilson was disturbed, although he strongly supported the innovation itself. After displaying a thorough understanding of metrics by providing pedagogical examples, he expressed his concerns:

The only thing I am disappointed with...is that in the introduction of anything new or any big change, there should first of all be some education. When I say education, I mean education for all, not only for the people who live in the city but also for those of us out in the country or in the islands. I want to ask the people in charge of this, how much have they done to educate the people of the outer island of Rotuma? I know that metrication is taught in all schools in Fiji, it has been so for a couple of years now, but what about the others? Are we going to bulldoze the whole thing over their heads? If so, they will be lost. I think some weights and measures should have been passed around to those of us who are far away in the out-lying islands so that we would know that one metre is a little longer than a yard. We should know metres are for length and grams are for weight and litres for fluid...

So, the only disappointment I have is that I feel sorry for the adults out in the villages. Once this is passed as law, they will never see pounds or yards again; it will disappear and there will be a big confusion. At least some table of measurement should have been sent out to the islands... We [in Rotuma] received pamphlets; if they were written in Rotuman they would have been helpful, but they are written in English and no Rotuman could follow it. Who is going to teach the people? (Senate speech May 31, 1979)

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### In defense of teachers and the teaching profession

Wilson's commitment to the teaching profession led him to champion their causes in the Senate. He was distressed by efforts to hold down the budget by keeping teachers' salaries low, particularly the salaries of primary school teachers. The argument that many of these teachers had poor credentials — had not received advanced education, and therefore were not entitled to salaries commensurate with other civil servants — would not wash with him. Neither he, nor most of his contemporaries, had had the opportunity to pursue education in formal institutions, but that did not make them any less competent or dedicated. When a structural review of the civil service was being conducted, he took the opportunity to remind his colleagues of the historical plight of teachers in Fiji.

Several excuses have been introduced to try and justify low salaries for primary school teachers. One of them is their academic standards. Most of those whom I am talking about finished school at class 8 level, or in those days it was only class 6. This low standard has been brought in over and over again to water down and justify the low salary paid to the primary school teachers... But if you look around the dominion today, and even outside the dominion, as far as the United States of America and even in England, you still find the products of those low standard primary school teachers. You have today Semesa Sikivou, Josua Rabukawaqa; these are the products of the low academic standard teacher who left school at class 8 level and who today are in the category of Grade II and Grade III. I humbly beg to disagree with such ways of thinking on the ability of the teaching standard of those teachers who are strongly penalised today.

Another argument which has been introduced to lower their salary is that there are too many holidays and they do not work long enough like other sections of the Civil Service. This is an argument which the teachers find difficult to swallow. In fact, this is one of the reasons they pressed strongly for a job-evaluation to find out whether it was really true that they start school at half past eight and finish at four. I can sincerely say that this is far from the truth. We start work and we do all our preparation long before 8:30 a.m. and after four you have to keep on marking all the children's books, if you wish to be a good teacher. Very often the world does not want to look at the good teachers who are working hard but pick out the bad ones here and there who drop out before four, and try to point out to the world that all teachers are the same as the few bad ones... I humbly beg to disagree with that view.

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Again I would like to present something that is very often forgotten about these teachers who are way-down today. If you look back again in the history of teaching, you will find that the system adopted for paying these pioneer teachers was a very poor one. Firstly, Government used what is known as the grant-in-aid system of paying a portion of the teachers' salaries to the school where the teacher was working. It started off with a 25 per cent grant. This meant that the "owners" of the school had to find the 75 per cent... In those far away days where committee schools found it very, very difficult to find the 75 per cent, the teachers were paid only the 25 per cent which was forwarded by the Government to pay them. When I discussed the situation with the District Officer in Rotuma in 1942 I was shocked to find that that was so. He tried to point out to me that there were no funds and this was the only money [available] — this 25 per cent... This was the old system of paying the pioneer teachers who have produced such great men to pave the way for the independence of Fiji today. Later on the situation improved; it rose from 25 per cent to 30 per cent, and then to 50 per cent and so on until today, the full 100 per cent is met by the Government.

But in the days gone by there was always that big snag that in the end the teachers could not persuade the "owner" of the school to pay the full 100 per cent. So they tried very hard to ask that they be paid direct from the Education Department. They saw that if the Education Department paid the full 100 per cent, and kept its own 25 per cent and compelled the owner of the school to forward its 75 per cent, the teachers then would be paid their full 100 per cent. That was the form of payment that the teachers fought hard [for] and won, but then they were up against another big problem. If Government was going to [make] that sort of payment then teachers must become civil servants... I am very happy to say that this came about in 1948. From that date, this bad, indirect form of payment disappeared and the direct form of payment under the heading of Civil Service came into practice... I would like to point out that although the figures look quite good inside this Structural Review, I would like to present to this House and to the people of this dominion the long sufferings of these low paid primary teachers who just had their heads above water in 1948 (Senate speech August 4, 1971).

However important Wilson Inia's other activities may have been — serving the church, organizing the Rotuman co-operatives, being a Senator — in the depths of his soul he was first and foremost a teacher. Everything else was an extension of his pedagogical self.



## Chapter 5: Rotuman Patriot

### CHAPTER 5: ROTUMAN PATRIOT

Although he spent much of his life abroad, particularly during his formative years, Wilson Inia's attachment to his home island remained strong throughout his lifetime. At every opportunity he served the Rotuman people, whether by running a hostel for students at Davuilevu, starting a high school on Rotuma, improving the living conditions in his district, serving as a District Representative to the Rotuma Council, assisting with the development of the co-operative movement, or representing Rotuma in the Senate. He did not ignore the needs of others — there are many Fijians and Indians who would testify to this. As many of his speeches reflect, and his religious principles required, his understanding of service knew no ethnic boundaries. Rotuma, however, came first. Perhaps because he had spent so many of his early years away, he may have had a need to affirm his Rotuman identity. The best way he knew of doing this was to use all his talents to assist the people of Rotuma to achieve their aims.

#### Service to Malhaha District

When Wilson and Elisapeti moved to Rotuma in 1953 they had to confront the task of adjusting to a new community. They were provided a house in the district of Malhaha, adjacent to the school grounds, some distance from Wilson's home district of Noa'tau and Elisapeti's home village of Savlei. Although the road around the island made it possible to get from one place to another with relative ease if one had a motor vehicle, public transportation was unreliable, so the new family put down roots in Malhaha.

With no immediate relatives to provide for their subsistence needs, the family was dependent on local generosity. It was forthcoming from everyone in the school district (Malhaha, Hapmak, Lopta), who took turns providing food, bringing baskets of taro, yams, fish, chicken, etc. In turn, Wilson dedicated his organizational skills to helping people in the district improve their standard of living. Water storage was the first problem he addressed. Rotuma has no rivers or permanent streams, and at that time was entirely dependent upon rain for fresh water.<sup>4</sup> He persuaded the people to set aside funds from their copra earnings to be used for building water storage tanks for each household. Then, using community labour, tanks were built one by one until every household was accommodated. He organized other house-improvement projects for many of the poorer families to bring up their standard of living. In the process he was teaching people how to manage money, how by joining together to save a small portion of their earnings each time they cut copra they could accumulate enough to do big things.

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<sup>4</sup> Since then an underground lens has been tapped, and most houses now have piped water.

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Saving went against the grain of Rotuman culture, which by stressing generosity encourages the immediate dispersal of money as it is acquired. But by recasting saving as a communal responsibility, through which everyone would benefit, Wilson persuaded people of its virtue. Also important was the trust people had in Wilson's integrity, and his ability of manage their money scrupulously. They could be sure he would not "borrow" from the communal pot to gratify his own needs or wants.

Rupeti Vaivao, in an unpublished document entitled "Co-operatives and Inia," summarized Wilson's involvement in the local community.

Mr. Inia's stay in Malhaha proved most fruitful and valuable. He formulated policies and campaigned vigourously to persuade the people to accept his plans and principles. He foresaw the people's needs and worked to change the lives and the attitudes of the people of Malhaha, thus making the environment a paradise. One of his principles was to love and care for the poor. He motivated the acceptance and practice of this principle in the district meetings with the chiefs and their people. Initially, there was a strong opposition to the proposals he made to implement the principle of sharing and caring, but later on the people of Malhaha adopted them. He also talked about the principles of self-help and human resources that equaled natural resources. Within a year of conciliation and negotiation, his principles proved fruitful and trustworthy. The people of Malhaha were very much delighted and had come within an ace of mutual understanding. Realising the value of his advice, they responded by trying their best to develop their own resources.

Mr. Inia saw the vital need for working capital which is the key to the development of the environment and its resources. He suggested that from the price of every basket of green copra, two shillings be deducted to go towards the district funds. This proposal was discussed in one of the district meetings and everyone unanimously agreed. He also held consultations with the people, particularly to ascertain possible ways of carrying out his housing scheme plan. Eventually, the people agreed that the district should remain divided into three groups as usual, and that building priority should be given to the less well-to-do members of the district community.

In addition to serving the local community in this informal capacity, in 1954 Wilson was appointed Chief Circuit Steward of the Methodist Church, Rotuma Division, and six years later, on August 11, 1960, he was made Justice of the Peace in the Eastern Division of the Colony of Fiji, which included Rotuma.

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When, in 1960, a rumour circulated that Wilson was going to be transferred away from Rotuma because of his alleged insubordination to the Government, the people of Malhaha came to his defense, and sent the following petition to the Colonial Secretary in Fiji:

We, the undersigned natives of Rotuma in the district of Malhaha wish to say that Mr. Wilson F. Inia has helped us so much that we feel we can never offer a better reward than by presenting before Your Honour, the good works done by him to be added to his credit. In addition to his official duties as teacher and administrator, he freely gave his support in all church activities and above all, he taught us the proper way of handling money matters and now we have seen for ourselves the result of his efforts. Each home in our district has a tank besides other improvements. In spite of the many items listed in our building programmeme which is under his guidance, there is a general anxiety and fear among us, that if he leaves us sooner than is expected, our great hope for a brighter future will come to nought. However, being in such an easy situation, we humbly seek your kind assistance in this matter:

Attached to the petition are 64 signatures. The petition was accompanied by a letter from Chief Aisea Tivakno of Malhaha, also addressed to the Colonial Secretary:

Circumstances caused me to write you this small epistle concerning your ever helpful Government Officer, Mr. Wilson F. Inia, J.P., of the Department of Education, who is now teaching in Rotuma as Headmaster of Malhaha Central School in my District. According to experience I will not hesitate in saying that he rightly qualifies to be a Justice of the Peace.

Peaceful living is one of the most difficult things to secure to-day, but since his arrival when I accepted his loving support, we straightaway began to see the dawn of a new day full of promises for a better future. Having shared his experience in handling financial problems we succeeded in effecting a construction plan which gave every home in my district, a concrete tank and some other improvements.

However, Sir, the above mentioned plan is only No. 1 on my set programmeme, the success of which depends upon Inia's counsel and guidance. It is said that if the face of one Jew is hit, the entire nation would bleed, and this saying also applies to us Rotumans, so to speak, that if this one gentleman departs all feelings will be hurt. But, whatever the case may be, hurt feelings or chop necks off, it is beyond our power to withhold him. Having realised our

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helplessness, I feel I have no other alternative but to seek your kind decision on this matter.

In closing Sir, I am happy to say that whatever happens, Wilson Inia is a real asset and first class neighbour to me and to Rotuma as a whole (Letter dated September 21, 1960).

The people of Malhaha further showed their trust in Wilson by electing him to represent them on the Rotuma Council. The Council included the chiefs from each of the island's seven districts, and a parallel set of representatives who were elected by secret ballot. It was chaired by the District Officer, and attended by the Assistant Medical Officer. The purpose of the Council was "to consider all such questions relating to the good government and well-being of the natives of the island as may be directed by the Governor or may seem to them to require their attention (Colony of Fiji Ordinance No. 4 of 1958)." The Council was empowered to make regulations relating to:

- (a) the keeping clean of Rotuma and the promotion of public health;
- (b) the social and economic betterment of natives;
- (c) the performance of communal work by natives and other communal activities of natives;
- (d) the control of livestock on Rotuma;
- (e) the care of native children and aged persons; and
- (f) the conservation of food supplies on Rotuma.

It also had authority to impose fines for breaches of its regulations.

The Council met quarterly and decided issues by majority vote, with the District Officer (D.O.) having the deciding vote in case of a tie, in addition to his initial vote. Meetings were conducted in the Rotuman language (since all the participants at the time, including the District Officer, were Rotumans), and the proceedings were translated into English for transmittal to the Colonial Secretary in Fiji.

In effect the District Officer was very much in charge. He was in charge of all Government facilities, was the Magistrate of the local Court of Justice, and administrator of the laws of the Colony. The Council was little more than an advisory body, concerned with informing the District Officer of what was taking place in the districts and conveying to the people his decrees. Wilson, however, took a much more active role. He proposed plans, argued for pursuing particular paths for development, and suggested specific ways to implement policies. This was contrary to the pattern that had existed from the time the colonial government had been established in 1881. More typical was a Council composed of "yes men," eager to give the impression of compliance though they sometimes led movements of passive resistance in their

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home districts. As we have seen, Wilson's outspoken frankness was not always appreciated by the District Officer, but his popularity with the Rotuman people remained strong. For the first time they had a voice in the Council that would stand up for their interests and was truly responsive to their desires.

### Rise of the Rotuman Co-operative Association

Commerce on Rotuma during the colonial period was dominated by the two European firms, Burns Philp and Morris Hedstrom, which divided the island into exclusive zones in order to avoid direct competition with one another.<sup>5</sup> Each firm had a main branch on the isthmus at Motusa and smaller shops situated in villages on their respective segments of the island. The firms imposed a rigid set of rules to raise their profits and stifle competition. No one was allowed to sell copra outside his or her area, for instance. Each household was limited to 3 or 4 baskets of copra on a given day, and the weight of each basket was limited to sixty pounds. A charge of a penny a basket was levied if the owner was absent and unable to assist in the weighing. The firms also exploited Rotuman labour for building copra sheds and other local facilities, without paying reasonable compensation. Rotumans who aspired to go into business for themselves were prohibited from buying goods, even from the firm which had no control over the area in which he resided. To make matters worse, the firms blatantly disregarded the rules for certain favoured individuals, particularly the friends and relatives of the shopkeepers. These favoured ones were given first choice in everything and otherwise unavailable goods were sold to them "under the counter."

In 1947 the colonial administration of Fiji passed an ordinance (No. 11 of 1947) establishing the position of Registrar of Co-operative Societies for the Colony and encouraging the formation of local co-operatives. In response, several groups on Rotuma decided to form co-operatives in order to combat the monopoly control of business on the island. Eventually five groups, classified as "canteens" emerged, one each in Oinafa, Lopta, Malhaha, Itu'muta and Noatau. With no prior experience in managing a business, little capital to work with, and antagonism from the firms, it was difficult going. Only the fierce determination of the members kept these groups from a quick demise.

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<sup>5</sup> For this section on the Rotuma Co-operative Association I am indebted to an anonymous, unpublished manuscript I obtained on Rotuma in 1960 entitled "A Brief History of the Co-operative Movement and its Achievements in Rotuma," and to copies of letters and reports made available to me by the RCA.

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Things improved briefly when a new man, named Roe, was assigned to manage Burns Philp. He co-operated with the fledgling co-ops and offered them material support, thereby gaining their confidence. However, the branch shopkeepers, themselves Rotuman, saw the co-ops as a threat to their well-being and maintained their antagonism, resorting to threats and rebukes and rejecting overtures for co-operation. In 1951 Mr. Roe was replaced by a Mr. Stock, who was far more antagonistic to the co-ops; indeed, he openly declared that he would put them out of operation altogether. He refused to supply the co-ops with any goods whatsoever, or to do business with any known co-op members. As a result, the co-ops transferred their business to a Chinese shop on the island owned by Gock Chim Young. The situation came to a head when a cargo shipment arrived for the co-ops, and was off-loaded at Motusa, the main anchorage at the time. The task was then to transport the goods to the individual co-ops, the most distant being Noatau, some 15 kilometers away. To do this they needed a truck. In the past the firms had freely rented a vehicle out, but not this time. Stock had decided to withhold even that business courtesy, and to force the co-op members to take the consequences. Faced with seeing their precious goods rot in the hot sun, the co-op members, and many of their friends, mobilized their efforts. They carried sacks of flour and sugar, cases of corned beef and other tinned foods, and rolled 44 gallon drums of fuel over the rough road around the island. So contrary to Rotuman notions of decency was the firms' denial of transportation, and so heroic were the efforts of the co-op members, that the incident galvanized support for the co-ops in a way that had previously been missing. The incident became a rallying cry whenever difficulties arose, like "Remember Pearl Harbour" was to Americans following the initiation of World War II.

An examiner from the Copra Board visited Rotuma in 1952 and issued a report criticising the co-ops for producing inferior copra. He noted that the groups were "ignorant and had no experience in running business" and expected them to operate at a heavy loss and eventually to fail. The co-op members were disappointed and disheartened, but they did not give up.

In 1953 Wilson Inia arrived on furlough, and advised the groups to seek Government Aid. He personally wrote to the Registrar of Co-operatives and asked for assistance. In response, the Registrar sent Inspector Butadroka to teach basic business skills and advise the groups on a variety of matters relating to co-operative management. At the time of Butadroka's arrival nine local groups were operating as co-operatives, and within a matter of weeks five more were formed, raising the total to fourteen. A bookkeeping class was formed and Wilson joined with Inspector Butadroka to teach it. Each co-op sent three representatives, although a number of other people, members and non-members alike, also elected to attend and were admitted. The class turned out to be so large that it had to be divided into two groups. One class was taken by Butadroka, the other by Wilson.

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During this period Wilson and Butadroka also held meetings all over the island in order to educate the populace, and discuss with them the nature of co-operatives. They considered a variety of possible ways to strengthen the movement, and devised a structure somewhat at variance with the usual scheme favoured by the Department of Co-operatives. The new plan called for establishing an association of the local co-ops, to be called the Rotuma Co-operative Association (RCA), so that a more solid capital base could be formed. A union would also allow for better co-ordination in importing goods and exporting copra. A portion of each co-op's shares was to be invested in the association, the remainder left on hand to meet local needs. A central committee was set up comprising a Chairman, an advisor (Wilson Inia), a manager, two representatives from each group, and an internal auditor. Central facilities were constructed in Noatau, at the opposite end of the island from where the firms' main branches were located.

The scheme was supported by the District Officer at the time, Fred Ieli. He helped Wilson organize the RCA and used his influence and office for the union's benefit. But the firms did not give up easily. They still had the advantage of a much stronger capital base, and they controlled both shipping to the island and internal transportation, owning the only trucks for transporting copra and supplies. Until 1955, when the RCA became fully operational, the co-ops still had to sell their copra and order their goods through the firms. The firms also operated the punts and launches required for loading and unloading cargo from ships, which had to anchor off shore, since there were no docks. This added shipping and handling charges to already high freight charges, thus lowering copra income and raising the price of imported commodities.

The early years of the RCA's development were very difficult and required great sacrifices. For the first several years co-op members worked without pay in order to keep their businesses afloat. But the movement endured, and gained momentum. In 1956 five of the local co-ops, with a total of 140 members and £8,865 subscribed capital met the criteria for registration, making them eligible for Government assistance. By 1958 two more qualified, totaling 239 members and £13,160 in subscribed capital, in addition to the RCA's £10,169; and by 1960 a total of thirteen societies boasted 513 shareholders (involving 84% of the households on the island) and £25,051 in subscribed capital, plus the RCA's £20,632.

In 1958 Wilson was awarded a scholarship, sponsored by the British Council, to study the operation of co-operatives in England and Scotland. On the way back he stopped in India and Sri Lanka to look at how co-operatives were run in those countries. He was away from Fiji for six months, and came back with some very definite ideas. What he saw convinced him that careful accounting, and regular audits, were the keys to success. If money could not be accurately accounted for it would disappear and the groups would bleed to death. Without proper accounting, he believed, trust would dissolve and the whole basis for co-operation would fall by the wayside. He also determined that maintaining a substantial capital base was vital for

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the success of co-operatives, and that a strong central committee was needed to supervise and check on the work performed by co-operative members.

To implement these ideas he recommended maintaining a high profit margin on sales in order to insure a stable capital base, then giving dividends at the end of the year depending upon overall profitability. Workers would also be paid from year-end profits. This meant charging higher prices for goods than the firms. From the Registrar of Co-operative's standpoint these innovations were a violation of the spirit of co-operation, and he accused the Rotuma Co-operative Association (RCA) of operating like a company, subject to taxation. He advocated decentralised decision-making, investing accumulated capital in equipment such as hot-air dryers in order to improve the quality of copra, paying workers direct salaries, lowering prices and eliminating the profit/dividend method of distributing benefits. The Rotumans, however, under Wilson's leadership, refused to budge. As a result the RCA found itself in a constant struggle with the Division of Co-operatives. Wilson had gained the people's trust, however, and when the rumour circulated during 1960 that he would be transferred, the co-op membership banded together to add their protest to that of his Malhaha neighbours, noted above. The RCA members expressed their apprehensions via a petition directed to Fred Ieli's temporary replacement as District Officer, Lieutenant. Paul Manueli. It read:

Sir,

We have the honour to write and seek the truth and your advice, sir, regarding information received that Government is considering the removal of Mr. Wilson F. Inia from Rotuma.

We knew that he has many powerful enemies from the commercial firms and even in Government, who would do their best to have him removed. If they succeeded, it will be a gain to them and a loss to us poor Rotumans.

He has continued, from time to time, to render help that we need on all branches of social life. But the most outstanding is the Co-operative Movement in Rotuma. It is through his self-sacrifice and teachings that the present attainment and progress in this movement has been achieved.

This movement is still in the toddling stage, and we do need his freely given help and advice to bring it up to a sound and better footing.

We are proud to be under the British flag, for the British Government stands for "Freedom and Justice."

If Government decides to carry out the removal of Mr. W.F. Inia, we submit copies with signatures from the members of the various Societies, as a petition against his removal.



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The Rotuma Co-operative Association continued to gain strength under Wilson's guidance, and eventually turned the tables on the firms. Co-op members were forbidden to transact with the firms, and the consequent fall in business led Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp to close up shop on Rotuma before the end of 1968, leaving RCA with a total monopoly over commerce on the island. Whereas the history of co-operation in the rest of Fiji was dismal, with failures the rule, the RCA was a resounding success. In 1969 the RCA's subscribed capital rose to £97,834 and it handled a copra turnover worth more than £280,000.

For Wilson the success of co-operation on Rotuma was a triumph of education, especially with regard to the handling of money. He saw the success as vindication of his belief in the importance of proper bookkeeping and auditing. When, in the Senate, he was confronted with the plight of Fijian co-operatives, he urged that the educational aspects of the co-operative movement be strengthened. During a debate concerning a proposed development plan that included provisions for co-operative movement education he used the success of the RCA as an example. He graciously gave Inspector Butadroka full credit, and with characteristic humility did not mention his own monumental role.

I wish to pay tribute to the officer who introduced co-operatives to Rotuma. He is Mr. Butadroka. When the Co-operatives Ordinance was passed in 1947 there were very few officers in the department then. The Rotumans could not wait for an officer to come. Boats called at Rotuma [only] once in three months, four times a year... [N]o one knew how to do it, and worse still, the whole thing was recorded in a cash book and nothing else. Several people made an attempt with the ledger but could not get anything right. They did that from 1947 [through] 1952 and for five years the co-operatives were running blindly. Fortunately they were honest and...kept the cash book right. When they were asked...what the profit was they said that they did not know much about it, but the cash book was all right. In 1953 we were able to persuade Mr. Butadroka to come to Rotuma to start a co-operative movement, and that was the first time we had an officer from the Department...

I see in the [proposed Development Plan provision for] co-operative movement education, and I support that very strongly because that was what this great man [provided for] us. He taught us how to keep the books, and...we had classes every night — officers and ordinary members, and they were taught everything. They were taught how to run a meeting, how to present a case inside a meeting; they were taught also to look after the accounts [and] how to audit them. Not only one or two officers were [trained], but...several people. [As a

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result] we did not have to depend on one person, but...had several to choose from to run the co-operative movement...

If this system of running co-operatives in the dominion will not change [toward] the keeping of the books by the members of the society, if people have to depend on the outside officers to come and write up everything, then the co-operative movement is bound to fail. The education system must be strongly emphasised [so] that [co-operatives] do not depend on one officer, but on several officers, including members. They must also have an internal auditor to keep the books right. They cannot depend on the outside official auditor. What is the use of coming after three months to inspect a co-operative society and finding that too many things have disappeared, and then growling at the officers and the society members? What is the use of that? You cannot bring back things that have gone. The owners themselves must be very watchful. There must be an internal check and members must be prepared to run their own society. The officers must be able to see where things are going wrong; they should, when the red light goes on, inform the committee to put things right...(Senate speech December 17, 1970).

### Problems of Co-operation

The development of the RCA was not without strains. Rotuma has a long history of inter-district rivalry, compounded by a division along religious lines between Catholics and Methodists. In the 1950s and 60s antagonism between the Catholics, who predominated in the districts of Juju and Pepjei and adjacent sections of Noa'tau and Itu'ti'u, and the Methodists, who occupied the rest of the island, was intense and sometimes bitter. Neither would participate in the events and ceremonies of the other. Local autonomy has always been the rule on Rotuma, so getting co-op groups based in villages to yield control to a centralised association took some doing. When amalgamation of weak co-op societies in Fiji was proposed in the same development plan Wilson again used Rotuma as an example, this time to warn proponents of the idea of potential hazards.

I want to give a warning regarding the...idea of amalgamation. It is true that if you wish to be strong you will have to amalgamate... The advantages are very great, but there is also a danger. In Rotuma we have 12 co-operative societies.<sup>6</sup> We were advised by the experts here in Fiji to amalgamate and it

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<sup>6</sup> Two of the original 14 societies folded.

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would become stronger. [But we were] struck with a great snag, which was that everybody was afraid of each other. By putting all societies together into one they [were] frightened [that they might not get] a fair dealing from the others. The members [thought] that their individual benefits [might] not be well looked after, and they were scared of each other. In the end we agreed to try it for at least three years, and when it was tried out we found that nobody was trying to put one over [on] the other. Everything became better...because expenses [were] very low and instead of having 12 sets of books to audit in a year we had only one. Instead of having too many cooks to spoil the soup we only had one cook...These were great successes, but there is a very dangerous thing in this, and that is that very often those who represent a small society, when they go back, do not call meetings to tell [their members] what is going on in the big central one. They did not tell them what was going on, and when complaints were raised by the members they were poorly presented, [so] no replies came back to them, and they reached a stage when members thought that the [association was] no longer theirs because they did not know very much about it... The Rotumans believe that everybody must know [what is going on] because it is their society, [and] if the link between the management committee and the owners down below is weak, the day will come when the owners will say it is not their society... [U]nless the members...look upon it as their own, secondary and tertiary societies will never succeed. It can never be run like a company with the directors just going on and not worrying about you, and you wait till the whole year is finished and they present a balance sheet and say that they have done a first class job and are re-elected. Now, in a co-operative society it cannot be done that way. You must present services and [the members] must know what is going on, [and] weaknesses must be presented. Unless that is done it will never succeed...(Senate speech December 17, 1970).

It was only the trust they had in Wilson Inia that allowed people of both faiths, and all districts, to keep co-operation alive in the early years. His absence from the island had kept him out of parochial politics, and although he was a leader in the Methodist Church he preached tolerance and understanding. But even he could not be a strong leader and remain free of conflict. The inevitable clashes occurred over mismanagement of funds on the part of some members. Despite the training in bookkeeping, shopkeepers or local co-op officers often could not account for money. Wilson suggested a rule, that any shortfalls at the time of audit would have to be made up personally by the shopkeeper or officer involved. People who persisted in draining money

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were dismissed from their positions, and if their culpability were flagrant they could be expelled from the Association. Although most people accepted these rules, those who were expelled became antagonistic. Their expulsion was all the more bitter after the firms went out of business, since RCA's monopoly left expelled members with no place to sell their copra or buy imported goods. Disputes also developed over re-payment of expelled members' shares in the Association.<sup>7</sup>

The most serious instance of money mismanagement occurred in the village of Oinafa, and involved the District Chief. The Chief's son-in-law was shopkeeper, and he experienced a serious shortfall in his accounts. The Chief had been appointed internal auditor, but he allegedly doctored the books to disguise the deficit, which amounted to several thousand Fiji dollars. When this was discovered he allegedly embezzled money from the Methodist Church to pay back RCA. Eventually the Chief and his son-in-law obtained funds from relatives in Fiji to restore what they had taken, but both were dismissed from their positions. The Chief then went to the RCA's central committee and formally apologised. His *faksoro* 'apology' was in high ceremonial fashion, involving a sacrificial pig, kava and fine white mats. He went *hen rau'ifi*, with leaves around his neck, symbolically offering his life to atone for his offense. This is a rare event in Rotuma, and is usually reserved for instances in which a life has been taken. For a chief to come *hen rau'ifi* and ask forgiveness is of great consequence in the context of Rotuman culture. It is virtually inconceivable for the offended party to refuse acceptance of an apology so presented.

But Wilson refused to accept the chief's apology. He argued that *hen rau'ifi* was a custom relevant to interpersonal offenses, as when one party injured another, but that it did not apply to business matters where money was involved. He said that embezzlement cannot be undone that way. He had made it clear when his own daughter had taken some change and lied about it that such dishonesty could not be tolerated, from near relatives, chiefs or anyone else. Many people were shocked by Wilson's breach of traditional etiquette, but he held fast to his position.

When the Chief's father, who was titled in his own right, heard about Wilson's refusal to accept the apology he was outraged. He sent a letter to RCA demanding that the Oinafa Co-op copra shed and shop, which were on his land, be removed immediately. RCA members disassembled the wooden shed and moved it. The store was made of cement, however, and could not be moved. Some of the men wanted to destroy it, but Wilson told them to leave the building as a "gift" for the Chief.

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<sup>7</sup> See Fiji Times account of a complaint registered by Pat Managreve in the *Fiji Times*, Wednesday, April 3, 1974.

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Soon afterwards, in 1977, the Chief's brother, who held a high position with the Government in Fiji, arranged for loans to begin a rival co-operative society, to be named Raho, in honour of the legendary founding ancestor of Rotuma Island. Another brother, who was titled in the district of Juju, was put in charge of operations on the island. At first he was a reluctant participant. Shortly after Wilson turned down the Chief's apology, he and his father went to Fiji, leaving the brother to supervise the removal of the RCA's buildings from their land. The brother was distraught and went to Wilson and Kamoe Petero, Manager of the RCA, to ask them not to go through with the removal. Then he went to Reverend Lagi's house in Noa'tau to complain about his father and brother's having left him to face the music. He told Reverend Lagi how embarrassed he was by the whole affair and asked for the Reverend's prayers. Later on, this man admitted that the Raho Co-op was created out of hatred and jealousy to hurt Wilson and the RCA.

The Chief, his father and brothers were counting on all the other malcontents joining their group, but such was not the case. People were well aware of the new society's beginnings in the Chief's predicament, and even though he did not play an active role in founding Raho, this hardly inspired confidence. Wilson took note of Raho's progress, or rather lack of it, in a letter to Elisapeti in which he expressed concern for the implications of the rivalry between Raho and RCA.

I am not sure about the new co-op, whether it will help raise Rotuma or cause disunity ending up in a big quarrel. I wonder how [the Chief] escapes being hauled into the Kainaga [Family] Co-op. Officially only 47 transferred into this co-op...Share capital transferred only \$8000 odd. Can you run successfully on this capital? They borrowed \$35,000 from the Development Bank, to be repaid - Interest & Principal. I don't know of any new shares obtained in Suva. The Co-op Dept. got a big shock when only this many joined up. They thought that every member had left the RCA & had joined this co-op. They certainly talked very big in Fiji, but final result not so. It looks like a Kainaga co-op plus...friends through 'drinks' in Juju. Remember that action speaks louder than words. God will only help in the long run & only enterprises run by Godly people. Money profits are not everything. It is the will of God which brings joy, peace and LOVE to the poor & unity is the key to success. Greed for wealth & power, hatred and disunity are the signs of ungodly enterprises. God help our people not to be caught in this worldly mad octopus (Letter dated February 15, 1978).

Raho foundered under the Chief's brother's administration and was reorganised under different management in 1990. As Wilson anticipated, inadequate bookkeeping and general

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mismanagement of funds kept the group from developing a stable capital base, so it never became a serious threat to the RCA's dominance. Two other breakaway groups emerged in opposition to RCA, both short-lived. From 1963-1967 the Rotuman Planters' Association handled a small portion of the island's copra, and the Rotuman Development Corporation did likewise from 1975-1979. Neither group could develop the infrastructure to compete successfully, but both, along with Raho, were indications that satisfaction with RCA's operations were not universal. Nevertheless, the Rotuma Co-operative Association represents the only major venture in recorded history in which the majority of the Rotuman people co-operated to shape their own destiny. Wilson Inia provided the indispensable leadership required to bring this about.

When, during my 1960 visit to the island, I wrote up my notes on leadership, I included the following passage:

Wilson Inia is the Headmaster of the Malhaha School, Circuit Steward of the Rotuman Methodist Church, and Advisor to the RCA. He is, without doubt, the most admired man in Rotuma and also the most influential. The people trust him without reservation. He is a most unusually mature individual of the highest integrity. He is neither a radical nor a conservative, but he looks forward to Rotuma's betterment with an understanding and compassion for its people. He resists change when he feels it would be harmful, but encourages it where he believes it will be beneficial. He fits the description of the autonomous "marginal" man, who is neither European nor Rotuman in his orientation, but who has developed the capacity for cautious evaluation. He is an enigma to the colonial administration because he is not overawed by them and feels free to take issue with their policies where he believes them to be in error.

He has the personal qualities of humility and generosity (he does an enormous amount of work for the RCA without pay) and fits the image of the "good man" in Rotuma to a T. He is not in the least self-glorifying and attempts to ascertain others' opinions to balance his own. Even if he disagrees with popular opinion at times, he does not make great efforts to convince them to change, because he is capable of understanding and appreciating their point of view, and realises that he possesses personal dominance that could persuade the people to make decisions against their genuine wishes.

Wilson Inia is a mature, moderate leader, with the finest qualities of leadership. He possesses...the capacity for intelligent and well-considered

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decision-making. He is capable of admitting that he does not know the solution to problems.

### Advocacy in the Senate

As Rotuma's only representative in the Fiji Legislature from 1970 through 1983, Wilson was an ardent advocate for Rotuman causes. He did his best to educate his colleagues about Rotuma's special problems, and strongly supported legislation he saw as benefiting the island. He was particularly concerned with measures that affected Rotuma's commerce, such as insuring the stability of copra prices and regularity of shipping.

### Copra

Up until recently Rotuma has been almost totally dependent on copra export for income. Government wages provided for only a few families; the vast majority had to cut copra to get money. Copra was the life-blood of the Rotuma Co-operative Association. So the entire economy of the island depended on copra prices, which unfortunately, had been extremely volatile over the years. In years when copra prices were high, the island prospered and people had plenty of money to spend; when prices dropped precipitously, the Rotuman people were financially impoverished. It was therefore with great enthusiasm that Wilson backed a bill to stabilise copra prices when it was proposed in 1976, but he made it clear the Rotuman people were not looking for a handout, a point he made over and over again in his speeches. The Rotuman people had a tradition of self-reliance and were prepared to help themselves whenever possible, but they wanted a fair deal from Government.

We [in Rotuma] are totally dependent on copra, and when the copra price reaches a level that is uneconomic, then there is no point in cutting copra in the bush. Therefore any scheme that would stop the price coming down to this low level would be very strongly supported by those of us in Rotuma, and I am quite sure by other islanders who depend entirely on copra. I have already voiced the appreciation of my people to Government when I came over in May last year, when I heard about the move that was being made to introduce a Price Support Scheme — I think that was the term used. Of course, all selfish people would like it to be a subsidy — a free gift, while other sections of our community bear the brunt. Today we hear it is a loan. But whether it is a subsidy or a loan, to those of us in Rotuma, this is life itself. Without the price coming to a level that would make it possible for us to live, any straw is good enough to cling on to...

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I can think of the time...which the Rotuman people will never forget, when the prices came down to one shilling [per hundred pounds] and a load of 140 pounds of copra was carried on a man's shoulder... It was not worth cutting, but what could we do? We had to buy kerosene for our lights; we had to have matches, and if we did not do that, it was going back to the old method. If you did not buy kerosene, you had to put a little stick in the centre of a bowl to light. But when it comes to clothing, what can you do — go back to the old skirt? You cannot buy a dress or a pair of pants for one shilling. The Rotuman will never forget that price. When I came over last year and the price fell below the \$100 mark [per tonne] there was great mourning [among the Rotuman people] and they all prayed that the little effort I could put in would be of some help, but before I arrived Government had already made the move. Other cries had been better, stronger and a move had been made to better the conditions of those who depend entirely on copra for livelihood, and I thank the Government for that...(Senate speech September 15, 1976).

Wilson argued that if copra growers were to get loans rather than subsidies then this should apply to all agricultural growers: “There is no point in making it a loan for the copra producers and a subsidy to the sugar cane producers.” But he believed so strongly in financial responsibility he argued not only against subsidies, but against interest-free loans as well. When some Senators expressed concern regarding the repayment of copra production loans, and suggested that the loans be interest-free, Wilson responded:

Quite a lot of people seem to think that we should not pay the interest; that it should be a free loan. I am one of those who cannot steer clear of the hard facts of life. If it is a loan, it has got to be repaid, and whenever you get a loan, you have got to repay it, not only the principal but the interest as well. The only ‘kerekere’ (request) I have in mind is that if Government [should] get a loan free of interest then it should also be given to us free of interest. But if there is any interest to be paid, then we will be prepared to pay interest as well (Senate speech September 15, 1976).

He argued that when better times came surplus income should be used to pay off the loans, but that once that had been accomplished the copra suppliers should receive the benefits directly. This he saw as a better alternative to ploughing funds into a stabilisation fund, even though it might mean the need to borrow again when prices fell.

In other speeches he questioned the validity of the grading system for copra, by which Rotuman copra was frequently rated as second class, resulting in a penalty of several dollars per



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tonne. He noted instances, for example, in which the same shipment of copra had been graded differently by two different companies (see Senate speech December 15, 1981).

### Shipping

Of parallel concern was the need for regular shipping to and from Rotuma. Without reliable shipping Rotumans were at a tremendous disadvantage when it came to commerce. Irregular schedules were also a terrible inconvenience to travelers, and made interaction between the island and Fiji excessively difficult. Thus when Government promised in its initial plan, presented during the first year of Fiji's independence, to improve shipping between the islands of Fiji, Wilson was very pleased. He took the opportunity, in his second speech as Senator, to express his gratitude and inform his colleagues about Rotuma's vulnerability to shipping irregularities.

I wish to say a big thank you to the Government of Fiji for helping the rural areas, particularly far away Rotuma, with [their] shipping problem[s]. Once upon a time we had four trips to Rotuma and that was all for the year. We had to use other people's ships. When the co-operative societies got a little bit stronger and worked upwards, freight rates climbed up also. [They] jumped from six to eight pounds plus handling charges, and when we tried to operate it we found it very difficult. Several members thought that if the expenses involved in shipping copra from Rotuma to Fiji [were] that high we might as well not do it. We were told that this freight which was used was a freight charge throughout Fiji and it could not be altered. When things got very dim we were told that there was a solution, and the solution was to try and charter a ship. We were very thankful to the co-operative officer who had a lot of experience, especially in the matter of handling ships over at the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. He was then the Deputy Director of the Co-operative Department in Suva. He was very unpopular for teaching us this new method of chartering ships. When we wanted to charter a ship nobody in Fiji wanted to charter their ship to us. We then had to search elsewhere and found a small one, a very small one and we tried it with great fear.

Strange to say, the first voyage out was a great success. We struck a figure and they told us that it could not be run [for £6 per tonne]. It had to jump up to £8 plus £1.13.4 for lighterage and handling charges, and 9d per sack of copra. This added up to...£2.16.0 a tonne... [O]f course the secret of handling ships is you must fill [them at] one end and you must fill [them at] the other end, and there must be a quick turn around. We...got the ship turned round, this small one, in 20 hours. Today the "Aisokula" and "Aoniū" we can turn around in 36 hours. That

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was the...secret of the whole thing, and when we did it, it was very successful and we kept on chartering ships from then up till today. We have no money to buy any ships and even if we managed to borrow or buy a new ship where is it going to go? Rotuma is so small. [A ship] has got to be kept working and kept running all the year round. That is unwelcome as far as Rotuma is concerned. So we have to have a small one so that nobody would like to take a ride on her... And when this old one dies it has to be moved out of Fiji. No one wanted to charter their ships to us in Fiji, and then we had to fall back on the Tongan Government ship [“Aoniū”] and we have used it from that day up till today.

There is great talk today of chasing the “Aoniū” from Fiji because she is an outside ship. We are frightened because once upon a time we totally depended on local ships and we did not have a fair deal and we nearly collapsed. But when we had the help of an outside ship to come to the rescue, we managed to survive. I wish to say...that because we managed [to control the] the movement of our cargoes from Fiji to Rotuma we managed to survive. Controlling the sea is a great thing for the life of an islander... [S]hipping is vital, and in particular to Rotuma (Senate speech December 17, 1970).

The help promised by the Government never materialised, however. Irregular shipping remained a serious problem throughout Wilson’s tenure in the Senate, and he continued to appeal for the Government to do something about the situation. His 1981 speech on the topic was particularly poignant.

There has been a lot of talk in this House in that the central roads in the country must be built by Government and that they must be good roads. A lot of complaints have come in from every direction — left, right and centre — as to how poor the state of the roads [is] and that they should be upgraded. Today you have a circular road around Viti Levu and the Vanua Levu one will be completed very soon. But if there is this idea that road building is to be confined only to the land, then God help the small islands. If Government is to provide roads on land, what about the small islands? If Government provides roads for you people on big land, I am quite sure that Government should also do something to improve sea transportation, from Suva to Rotuma — a distance of about 400 miles. It would be about the same distance to Ono-i-Lau...

[P]rivate shipping is very good, but if one monopolises one route, a lot of people will suffer... I wish to implore the Government to please try and help us out in this area. If it can build roads for the country people, it can build ships for

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us also... If private enterprises refuse to serve the islands in Fiji, because it is not a paying proposition, then who will come to serve us? Only the Government, and that justifies Government's building ships and providing ships, particularly to islands not properly serviced by private enterprise... [I]f your roads are paid for by Government's funds, surely you should pay the losses incurred by [a Government ship] (Senate speech June 25, 1981).

He tried to impress upon his colleagues the importance of shipping for maintaining a decent standard of living on the outer islands.

I would like to put in a plea. Some of the good things in life which the urban dwellers have the rural dwellers would like to enjoy...too. When we visit Suva and see the [goods in the shops] we would like these things to be available on our islands also. When these things are missing in the shops on the islands the villagers are very angry. It is a very difficult job because it means that a lot of capital must be injected into the societies in order to be able to stock their warehouse. In most cases, when all the goods that come in are placed on the shelves in the shops, nothing is left in the bulk stores...

[I]f you have a regular service then you can plan [with] a small capital. With a regular service, if you know the rate of consumption, you can buy this much and say that that is sufficient for two weeks. If you know the boat will come every two weeks, you can plan it that way, but this is not possible with the sort of shipping services we have, which are irregular. We do not know when ships are going to turn up. We do not have the money to order in huge quantities and we do not control the movements of ships. No wonder the rural shops are empty and the members are angry. Therefore, it is a very important point...that the shipping services be regular (Senate speech June 25, 1981).

### The Importance of Rotuman Self-Reliance

Although Wilson fought hard to gain Rotuma its due from Government, he cherished his people's autonomy and their capacity for self-help. Aware of the dangers of economic dependence, he strove to impress upon Rotumans the importance of solving their own problems by relying on their own resources. One reason he felt so strongly about co-operation is that he saw it as a self-help project (Senate speech November 19, 1975). When people complained that nothing could be done someplace because Government funds were not available he sometimes became impatient, and used Rotuma as an example of what could be done.

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[S]upposing funds are not available and you ask for certain things to be brought in. You are told if you ask for an ambulance that a certain place has not got an ambulance. If you ask for an X-ray plant, you are told that a certain place over there has not got an X-ray plant. If you ask for a maternity ward, you are told that there is a certain place over there, bigger than Rotuma, that has not got one. They might say, “We would like to erect one but it would be very unfair because the moment we start giving you an ambulance, everybody will be asking for ambulances right round the dominion, and who is going to foot the Bill?”

I wish to draw the attention of the House to my...most important point. When you cannot get it by the kerekere method (milking this Government cow) well, milk your own cow!.. You will pardon me...if I mention a few attempts made by that far away little place [Rotuma] in answer to...those in authority. We were told by the good doctor on the spot [Enele Koruru] that if there was a maternity ward, it would help to preserve the lives of the Rotumans very much. That old hospital is not good. So we built one, not only built the ward but had it fully equipped, furniture and all, even mattresses and sheets and a clock... When [Doctor Karuru] said, “The X-ray process is too slow, we have to send people over to Fiji to be X-rayed. If only we had an X-ray plant here in Rotuma to speed things up, to be able to see the insides of Rotumans and preserve their lives,” we bought him one. He had great difficulty in moving about the place. He was a great worker. I believe...doctors work 24 hours day and night. So we bought him first a motorcycle but we found that it was very hard on him; the roads were so horrible that he would not live long if he climbed up there on that motorcycle... We asked for an ambulance and we were told, “No, it would be impossible.” So we bought two ambulances, in reality. When the first one was too old it was condemned [and] a second one was bought...

They wanted radios to amuse sick people, so we got radios — our good ladies were good enough to buy them. Then again they wanted refrigerators to preserve fish and food, which would balance the diet of the patients and make them recover quickly; we had to go to the expense of buying deep-freezers... I would like to tell the House why [we provided all these things at our own expense] — because we are so isolated. When we received no reply, we decided to buy these things ourselves (Senate speech May 7, 1971).

Needless to say, Wilson had a hand in organising the self-help projects he described. Fund-raising for communal purposes is not always easy on Rotuma, not because people are reluctant to

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give generously, but because funds too often disappear before the project is completed. But under Wilson's leadership they were confident that all the money would be accounted for and what was hoped for would materialise.

### The Aftermath of Hurricane Bebe

When Hurricane Bebe devastated Rotuma in October, 1972, destroying most of the crops and houses, the Government did seek to help. Using relief funds donated by the United Nations and several foreign countries, a ship (the *Degei*) was loaded with food (rice, milk and biscuits) and sent immediately to Rotuma. Upon the ship's arrival, the Commissioner Eastern, George Mataika, called a special meeting of the Rotuma Council to discuss the situation. Dr. Aisea Erasito, himself a Rotuman and the Medical Officer for Fiji's Eastern Division, noted that on several occasions in the past Rotumans had gamely ridden through hardships caused by natural disasters, and had refused to accept help from the outside world. Dr. Erasito then suggested, provided the Chiefs and the people of Rotuma would agree, that the food brought by the *Degei*, with the exception of milk, be returned to Fiji to be reallocated to more needy cases in Fiji. Wilson spoke in favour of the suggestion with the proviso that food be sent a month later, at the end of November. In fact, of course, emergency food supplies were not needed at the time. As Wilson pointed out in a Senate speech soon afterwards, food is plentiful immediately after a hurricane. It is later on that shortages are likely to develop. But there can be no doubt that the Rotumans, and Wilson in particular, were determined to rehabilitate the island with a minimum of external charity. The tone of his Senate speech following the hurricane makes this clear.

I wish to thank the Government of Fiji for being so quick to come and see us... A few days after Hurricane Bebe the Rotuma Council Committee met to discuss the food situation and we came to the conclusion that there was plenty of food just then; that this food should be returned and that we would need Government's help towards the end of November. It all [was sent] back, and that was the official situation in Rotuma. You can imagine the great shock we had when it was announced over the air that 4,000 Rotumans were suffering, starving, and needing food badly. From that day up till today we have been...trying to trace who sent this message over. Rotuma Council said something, somebody else said something else, and a ship turned up with the Commissioner Eastern and a load of food. He got there only to find that we did not need the food until the end of November. Some of us were a little bit annoyed...

This is the part that I want clarified...; if a hurricane struck today and destroyed all plantations, houses and everything, would we starve tomorrow? No, this would not happen. It cannot happen in Rotuma and I am quite sure it cannot

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happen here [in Fiji] because if it did happen anywhere, the people there must have been starving before the hurricane, too. In fact in Rotuma we had too much food all smashed down, which needed to be used very quickly. I want to make this point very very clear. Whether it be Rotuma or anywhere else, if the need is there the day after the hurricane, then it is not the hurricane that has caused the problem, it was there before the hurricane and it should be treated differently...

Government kept its word [to send another shipment at the end of November]. Food sufficient for 2000 people for a full month was sent and they said that at the end of the month they would send another shipload. We did our very best to speed up things in order to put the food problem right as quickly as possible and not to make the work of the Government very difficult. I hope that my people will try their best to be the first to be off this relief, and beat the people here in Fiji who received the supplies first. It is [the result of] such spirit that countries...prosper. We should be prepared to work hard and suffer a little bit for the sake of the country and not just use the hurricane relief to get things for nothing (Senate speech December 14, 1972).

Wilson took this opportunity to remind the Senate of the importance of regular shipping, of what it would mean not only for Rotuma's recovery but for lightening the burden of Government.

I am glad...that we have a very sympathetic Government which, even without being asked, brought a ship-load of foodstuffs, and I believe that if Government can do that, surely we can put all our trust in its hands to see that all our other problems, if placed correctly, would receive some help. How can we put things right quickly? I would like...to mention how we can help the Government of the day make the burden a little bit lighter. We are doing our best...to plant our food to serve two purposes: firstly, the low quality dalo which could be used to keep the home fires burning, and the good ones to be shipped over here as a "cash crop". This is something we are working very hard on and very quickly; we are trying to kill two birds with one stone...

We hope...that when the time does come for the shipment of these food crops, there will be a ship available to bring [them] over. The old means of communication between Rotuma and Fiji through charter by the Co-operative will be disrupted this year because the position of copra is so uncertain, and we no longer can say that we can have say, seven voyages, as we used to in the past. We would be lucky to have even one voyage, but I certainly have my doubts regarding a second shipment.

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Now the charter system can only be successful if you have full loads both ways, but if you are not able to have full loads both ways, then it would be unwise to have this system as it would only be expensive and impractical. So I wish to place before Government this major problem regarding the shipment of foodstuffs, which we are depending on as a quick “cash crop”, brought over here to Suva for sale. We hope that some form of help could be given to us whether by subsidising a ship or by loading our goods on a Government vessel. These are perhaps ways, we hope, that Government would look into [helping] us overcome the money “starvation” that will soon come to the place in a few months time (Senate speech December 14, 1972).

The shipping problem proved intractable, however, much to Wilson’s disappointment. Years passed without significant improvement, and towards the end of his career his speeches on the subject contain an element of bitterness. During a 1982 speech, ten years after the devastating storm, he grumbled about lost opportunities.

After Hurricane Bebe, when the Rotuman people had no coconuts on their trees, we were advised by Government to work hard, firstly to feed ourselves and that if there was a surplus, to send that over to the market here in Suva in order to get some cash. I was very active then and I did my very best to urge our good people to work hard and plant a lot of dalo. We complied with Government’s advice as we had agricultural officers there to help us and it was very successful... But when we came to selling the surplus, we were faced with difficulties...

[W]ith Rotuma, the problem number one has always been transport. When we tried to get transport we always had great difficulty. As most of our crops grown are of a perishable type, you cannot afford to wait for long. When the ship turns up, we have the dalo sent over. If we do not have to wait very long for the ship to arrive, the dalo will not go bad. But Rotuman dalo grows very fast and it also gets bad very fast if it is not sold and used right away.

So, when the boat did not come, we waited and waited and the dalo got over-matured. When [the boat] was finally sent over, not very many people liked it because when it came to the cost and the return involved, it was not very much. That was the first year... I thought that just because it was the first year this was only a teething problem. But when it continued up to the third, fourth and fifth year, I just gave up.

The first point is why urge us to work hard and grow more? One can say that this is the way in which you could save yourself. But when we worked very

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hard and there was the fruit there, it could not be transported and sold. This, I think...is very unfair... [W]e are right in the middle of the orange season, but there is no boat and the oranges are not going to wait for us...

[A] New Zealand team turned up two weeks ago and asked the Rotuman people, "What is the biggest problem here and [let's] see if we could help you solve it?" They were interested in oranges. When there was a long silence in the meeting, I said: "Gentlemen, if you ask for problem number one here in Rotuma, I can give you the answer now. It is shipping; there is no transport for the produce which is grown here. If you are interested in the oranges, I would say that you will have the same trouble, because the oranges, whether processed here or shipped to Suva, have to be transported. And if there is no good, regular transport, you will be stuck."

At that time, there were 6,000 bags of copra in Rotuma, but there was no ship. The Government ship, Dausoko, which I was in, arrived in Rotuma and brought back only 900 out of the 6,000 sacks of copra. We had to do this in order to bring some of the oranges and other foodstuff belonging to the passengers. We had high hopes that it would be a big ship. Well, that is the best that could be done for the people of Rotuma... When I left Rotuma...the number of sacks of copra had risen from 6,000 to 8,000. What amount of money [is] involved? Over \$100,000.

So, problem number one is transport. We hope that if the transport problem is improved..., it will not only help the good farmers whom you persuade to work hard, but it [will] get them a good return for working hard, because just now they are not very happy (Senate speech May 5, 1982).

Hurricane Bebe did more than just damage food crops and copra production. Although fortunately no lives were lost, more than half the houses on Rotuma were destroyed, and six schools were either damaged or destroyed, necessitating a major rebuilding programme. The problem was how to pay for it. Wilson negotiated an agreement with the Minister for Urban Development and Housing, Vijay Singh, for a loan scheme to help people rebuild their houses. The loan, for \$100,000, was interest free to the Rotuma Council, with no repayment for 3 years, then repayment in full during the 2 following years. The Council in turn provided approximately \$280 worth of building materials (supplied in bulk by Government, in accordance with a list to be prepared by the Council) per household. Households were to repay the Council over a five year period. Rotumans found the proposed pre-fabricated houses too small, and asked for larger ones (24 x 18 feet). Since the money available was insufficient, an agreement was negotiated



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that the houses be built without walls, each household taking responsibility for constructing its own. The Royal New Zealand Army sent a contingent in May, 1973 to supervise the construction of hurricane-proof houses, and in the incredibly short period of three weeks, assisted the Rotumans in putting up 302 family dwellings.

Wilson was delighted. It represented to him the best form of co-operation between foreign aid, Government assistance and self-help. New Zealand provided the expertise needed to rebuild in a short period of time, Government provided the means of obtaining the needed materials for rebuilding, and Rotumans provided the labour. He was much more comfortable with loans in the form of building materials than he would have been with individual cash loans or outright grants-in-aid. The scheme he negotiated actually reinforced Rotuman notions of self-reliance, despite substantial assistance from outside.

Always alert to possibilities for turning disaster into opportunity, Wilson argued that a wharf scheduled for construction on Rotuma, at an estimated cost of \$42,000, be built with local labour to offset copra losses with wages. He suggested that the work be rotated between the districts, so that most men on the island would have access to income to help tide them over the difficult period. The Government complied, and as a result many families were able to buy sufficient building supplies to complete the reconstruction of their homes Senate speeches December 14, 1972; December 18, 1973).

### To Build an Airport

One possible means of alleviating Rotuma's isolation was to build an airstrip on the island and inaugurate regular air service. This had been proposed during the colonial period, but Rotumans showed little enthusiasm for the project, especially if they were required to bear the financial burden for the facilities. Even when general agreement was obtained, acquiring land proved a serious problem. Rotumans were willing to allocate land unsuitable for coconut plantations (virtually their only source of cash income, from copra) or staple crops, but were extremely reluctant to give up productive lands. Since a number of different extended families' consent was required, negotiations were protracted and frequently bitter.

Wilson was ambivalent about an airport on Rotuma. He saw the possible advantages of regular air service to the island, but worried about who would ultimately benefit. Given the likelihood that fares would be high, only the wealthy would profit. An airport might also encourage a form of tourism that could threaten the rural way of life he cherished. When some recalcitrant individuals on Rotuma refused permission to use their land for airport facilities, Wilson expressed sympathy, but he nevertheless did his best to see the project through to a

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successful conclusion. Addressing the Civil Aviation Bill of 1976, he expressed some of his concerns.

I totally support the Bill that is before the House. I wish to devote myself to clause 13 which says: "...the Minister may authorise the acquisition of land by agreement or, where agreement is not possible, he may authorise an application to be made under the provisions of the Crown Acquisition of Lands Ordinance to acquire any land compulsorily."

I hope that the Minister will not use this very much. I know he is quite fair in that, as in the case of a public road where the acquisition of the land to make it possible [for] trade goods to pass by, this is quite reasonable. I am thinking particularly of acquiring land where later on you will have an airstrip or an aerodrome built, perhaps under the same reasoning of its becoming a public airway just like a road.

I wish to point out...that if this airway can be used for the public without any trouble, I do not think there is anything wrong with it, but if the fares should be so high, then it would be impossible for the poor public to use this great airway... I think particularly of Rotuma, where...negotiations have been going on for several years for this very purpose... [T]he Rotumans offered a portion of Rotuma that they found difficult to develop, but which was suitable for an airstrip. Unfortunately it turned out to be very expensive, [as] it happened to be a stony part of Rotuma. Preference was given by the Government to flat coastal land which would be very cheap to deal with. They tried the Noatau flat, which was full of coconut trees, but the Noatau people turned it down. The Rotumans then offered two good but very expensive spots. One was the Motusa Bay...and the next one was a portion between Oinafa and Lopta which was very stony. The Government thought it was too expensive and turned it down. Lately they were able to persuade the Rotumans to offer a portion of the island where it is flat and close to the coast between Malhaha and Ropure. This would mean that some of the coconut trees will have to be cut down and the owners, have, at last, agreed to let that portion be used.

Although I am speaking of Rotuma...I am also thinking of other islands in the Fiji group where one day this form of communication will be introduced. If the land is too small, I hope that those in authority will not speed things, in order to do it in the simplest and cheapest method, by chopping down the coconut trees

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of these poor people, [especially since] quite a lot of [them] cannot afford the high fares.

...[W]hen I made enquiries [to the Minister in charge some time ago] as to...how much the fares would come to — sea voyage by boat-deck is \$12.50, saloon \$25.00 — [he mentioned] a figure of nothing lower than \$50.; it will probably be not below \$80. ...[H]ow can the Rotumans afford to travel by aeroplane? ...[I]f we are to make it really public, then I would beg the Government to look into the situation as far as fares are concerned. If it is beyond the reach of the poor public, I think it only fair that a subsidy be given in order to make it possible for them to use this means of public transport, since we live in modern days (Senate speech June 29, 1976).

Negotiations continued to drag on in Rotuma, and the following year Wilson again addressed the issue, reiterating some of the same points he made in his 1976 speech.

[Last year a] certain gentleman who owned the piece of land where the airstrip touched did not give his consent, and therefore the whole thing flopped. This year he has given his consent but unfortunately, the people want to switch to a much bigger and better site, which runs parallel to the Government road, from Ropure right up to Malhaha. This time it is not 3,000 feet, but 5,000 feet. The original width was only 276 feet, but this time they want 250 feet on one side and 250 feet on the other, making a total width of 776 feet.

The area of Rotuma is only 18 square miles..., one fifth of which is covered thickly with lava and cannot be used. As you have heard...we wanted to offer the undeveloped portion of the land, but unfortunately it has not worked, because a considerable amount of money will be needed. A piece of land 5,000 feet long and 776 feet wide would give an acreage of about 88 acres; 88 acres for the people in Fiji proper is only a drop in the ocean, but not for an 18-square mile island. The best land, which is already [planted] with coconut trees, must be [cleared]. We asked the team to survey and mark the land in order to make it possible for the owners to see whose land and how much of it was going to be taken away. Unfortunately, the Minister was not able to come along with the team; only the officials came, and because they could not finalise things, a lot of things were left in the air.

The most important thing that we brought up before the team that day was the matter regarding the rent of the land. The revenue of the Rotuma Council depends on the amount of copra produced on the island — 10 per cent of it [i.e.,

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income from copra] goes to the Council to operate. As you know...provincial councils are not easy to operate, particularly on the income side. [A] poll tax was used and we even tried [a] land tax, but they did not work very well.

The Rotuma Council pointed out that it was going to lose a lot of revenue. It wanted some sort of revenue to come from the airstrip, the landing fee, you might call it, either directly or indirectly through passengers or through planes which use the airstrip. The experts did not say anything. They tried to point out the importance of the airstrip to the Rotuman people and we agreed. But would the Rotuman people use the airstrip? What will be the fares? When we asked them about the fares, they said it would not be less than \$50, that it would be between \$50 and \$100. [T]hey said it would be cheaper if we chartered planes. Now, how many Rotumans can use that airstrip? Is it only to make it easier for the rich to come to Rotuma or is it really to help the Rotuman people?

Sailing on boats to Rotuma today costs \$28 for...deck passage and \$45 for saloon. I have noticed that it is easy to get a saloon passage from Suva to Rotuma because in Suva you can find money easily. But, from the other end that is not easy. If Government really wants to help the Rotuman people, then why not subsidise the fares? The team hesitated and could not give a good reply to that.

To the old farmers of Rotuma money is not very important, but the *via* or the *papai*— the giant *dalo* —is very important because they last long, and during hurricanes we can rely on it; it is looked upon as the most valuable food in Rotuma. The area where the airstrip is going to run is fairly close to an area where a lot of *via* is grown, and the old farmers are saying, “Mark the ground so that we can see whether the *via* will have to be chopped off also.” Because of all these difficulties nothing was finalised and the team returned, but they marked the ground to show everybody just where the airstrip was going to run. It is going to run alongside our primary and secondary schools in Rotuma and we asked, “Would it not be dangerous to have the airstrip close to the schools?” and they said, “Do not worry, it should be all right and there would not be accidents.” Is it true that there would not be any accidents at all? Would there be no accidents such as planes missing the airstrip and running into the schools? These were some of the questions we asked the team but they were not easy to answer and that was the end of that meeting. We hope that in the new year a better meeting will be arranged where things will be properly thrashed out. This is being done for the betterment of the Rotuman people and we hope that the Rotuman people will

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benefit from it, and be able to use it. Then only will it become a great asset to our island (Senate speech December 20, 1977).

The Rotumans eventually agreed to the Malhaha site and construction began on the airstrip, although its length was reduced to 3,000 feet. The coconut trees were cut down and landowners were given acceptable compensation, although some were unhappy about its distribution. Wilson carefully monitored the progress of construction. No issue concerning the airport was too trivial to attract his attention. He harboured apprehensions about the whole business and was quick to acknowledge potential problems brought to his attention. In a 1979 speech he referred to two new difficulties.

Towards the sea end of the strip there is a public road. Now, you cannot allow people to travel across an airstrip, even a short distance. It is too dangerous. When we made enquiries as to how the Government was going to solve that, the suggestion put to us was to make a road right along the beach. If you do that, the plane would still go over your head. We are waiting to see how fool-proof that road is going to be. Also, there are big waves and every time there is a big north-westerly, this would be flooded. We are keeping quiet about this... We hope the experts will find a way out of this. I know of only one way out there — to go under a tunnel to the safer side. To try and walk across when a plane is coming down does not sound very safe.

The second problem regarding the airstrip is that the Malhaha people have a pigsty next to the airstrip. Now, instead of putting up a new fence (since the old one had to be pulled out) they have decided to go without it. There is no fence and the pigs are all over the place. I hope the authorities concerned will have another look and see how they could put this right. When I got to that place it was too late. The fence was already pulled out in order to make way for the airstrip and no replacement fence was erected further back. So, the pigs are all over the place (Senate speech May 30, 1979).

Such concerns reflect Wilson's pragmatic side. He could not resist making suggestions for solving practical riddles, and even made proposals for solving complex engineering problems.

They have changed the airstrip from 5,000 feet to 3,000 feet...for the simple reason that they thought that by cutting the little rise over the beach side and pushing the earth down to the lower side where the swamp is, they could easily fill it up, thus completing the airstrip much faster. But they forgot the structure of Rotuma, that the deeper you go down you are sure to strike the Rotuma rock,

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which is an unusual one. If you use a hand drill, it is almost impossible to go through. They have upset the programme of the Public Works Department and they finished up by bringing in a new drill that works on its own. They are doing their best to have it completed this year. When I made some inquiry they said that it would be impossible to finish it this year and it would probably be finished next year. Over the air they said there was a possibility of completing it this year, so I would like to suggest a few things.

Firstly, that they can revert to the use of dynamite. There is a pile of huge stones there and these could be carried down to the wharf at Oinafa, where it would stop the waves from damaging the wharf. This would be a good opportunity for them, while they still have their equipment, to make use of these rocks.

Secondly..., perhaps there was some compensation in that they found a hill of lava there which they cast on to the airstrip and ran their rollers over and this helped in the completion of the airstrip without the use of concrete, coal tar or anything else. That would be of great advantage...

Before I leave Rotuma Airstrip, might I at this juncture say two important things. Firstly, I hope that the Public Works Department will not rush the job and try and get the plane in too quickly. That would be very dangerous. Miles of rock are still by the side. They have got a small strip in the centre and...[i]f a plane misses the airstrip and strikes the rock just next to it, there would be a big accident and I hope fire-fighting equipment will be there also. Too much haste will not be a very good thing. We do not want a mishap to take place at this stage...

I hope Government will use [the machinery it has brought to Rotuma for other purposes], because it will be very difficult to bring those machines back to Rotuma again in the future. This would be a good opportunity to look at the rural roads. The only death trap in Rotuma is at the sharp bends where several accidents have taken place already. I am not sure what the Government is waiting for, probably for a Rotuman to die before they fix these dangerous bends (Senate speech December 11, 1979).

Construction of the airport met with social as well as physical difficulties, resulting in further delays. A dispute developed between the workers on the project and the Head of the Public Works Department. Wilson complained that the Rotuma Council was initially excluded from the process of resolving the dispute, thereby emphasizing the marginality of local government to

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development projects. Only after the Public Works Department failed to settle the issue on their own did they revert to asking the Council to intervene. The Council proceeded to solve the problem in a “chiefly” manner, and the men went back to work. Wilson cited this incident to illustrate the tendency of Suva-based ministries to ignore local governing bodies, and reported to his Senate colleagues a motion passed by the Rotuman Council that in the future all rural development projects involve the Council directly.

The airport on Rotuma opened in time for the centennial celebration of Rotuma’s cession to Great Britain, in May, 1981. Wilson expressed his gratitude for the new facility, and seemed pleased with its size and quality. However, a new set of issues emerged, having to do with service to the island, and he was just as ready to tackle these problems as he had been ready to address those concerned with airport construction.

The Civil Aviation Authority first offered [the Rotuma route] to Air Pacific but they turned it down. It was then offered to Fiji Air and they took it on. When we had the Rotuma [Centennial] Celebrations last year, a lot of people came to the island and Air Pacific also brought in people. When the celebrations were over, Air Pacific wanted to stay on and that was when the trouble started. Fiji Air thought that as Air Pacific had been given the chance but had turned it down, the work should be in the hands of Fiji Air.

The trouble was brought before the Rotuma Council and after we heard the complaints, we passed it on to the Civil Aviation Authority and told them that we had no objections to both of the airlines operating as long as we have good service. We mentioned some of the services that we would [like].

The first thing that we mentioned was a rate that would be within the means of the ordinary Rotuman, as we thought that the \$94 they started with was very high. Today, the air fare is \$95. Air Pacific, in their short period of operation were able to bring it down to \$85. Fiji Air could not do it.

Another important thing we mentioned was that travelling by plane itself should be comfortable. With the advent of planes, our women and children saw a good opportunity of avoiding the long journey by sea — 48 hours of it aboard a small ship. Fiji Air was operating a Twin Otter which was quite good; it had 19 seats (it could only carry nine or ten when flying to Rotuma); there was plenty of room but it had one big snag; no toilet conveniences... It is all right for a 15 minute flight within Fiji but to go to Rotuma on a Twin Otter it takes 2 1/2 hours. And if you cannot find Rotuma (as has already happened), then you have five full hours to hold yourself down strongly, wondering what is going to happen...

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These are some of the things we mentioned to both these quarrelling airlines. We asked them to provide first-class services, and whoever out of the two can provide these services should be the one to continue operating.

We were rather shocked when one Fiji Air plane could not find Rotuma. We thought that that was only confined to the sailing ships of the olden days, who did not even have the fortune of seeing the sun or the stars. These ships could not find our little Rotuma. But to find that an aeroplane with all the sunshine it could have above the clouds [could] still not locate Rotuma, is something that we would like to pass on to the good authorities...

The third point that we mentioned to them was that we do not like aeroplanes landing on Rotuma on Sundays. We have also...asked ships not to arrive in Rotuma on a Sunday. The chief reason is that Sunday to the Rotuman is a very important day; it is the day of worship, and when an aeroplane or ship arrives on a Sunday, that day is interrupted... [W]e hope Government will take this into consideration [and not] upset something that has become part and parcel of the real life of the Rotuman people today, upon which their happiness is dependent. We feel that such disturbances on Sundays are not in the best interests of the Rotuman people. It may be all right with you good people here, but not so with us, and we hope you will respect the feelings of the Rotuman people.

These were some of the things the Rotuman Council mentioned to these good people who are fighting...to take over the plane services in Rotuma. There is a beacon in Rotuma which is run by oil and diesel, and I think it is costly. I noticed in the Budget that they have put down a new solar type beacon to be tried out in Rotuma. This is an experiment and I hope it does work. With a proper diesel one, planes still get lost and with the solar one..., if there is no sunshine, I hope the situation will not get worse.

Those of us who use the air services today (and I happen to be one of them) notice that it is not operating well. Whenever you enquire for a seat to Rotuma they always reply that [the plane] is full. [Although] I cannot go back to Rotuma because the plane is full all the time, my wife tells me that when [a recent] plane landed in Rotuma, only two [people] alighted... She [was] a little bit annoyed because she thought I was putting up an excuse to stay here. The last time I went to Rotuma on a Twin Otter, eight passengers were booked here in the office. When we arrived in Nausori, only three of us turned up, and we had to wait for another half an hour for the other five passengers, who did not turn up at all. I mention this...because these are some of the things that annoy the Rotuman



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people. I hope that the people who are involved will have another look at its way of operation.

I might add...a very important point — that when you operate a service like this, we hope both ends meet. We do not want Fiji Air to run into debt... [W]e would like a service that would be good both ways, good for those of us who use it, and also good for those who are operating in order not to become a financial burden on the owners in years to come (Senate speech December 15, 1981).

Wilson ended this section of his speech on a poignant note concerning the argument, offered in favour of having an airport on Rotuma, that medical care would be improved. He could not resist mentioning a case in which air transportation had the reverse effect, suggesting that to the end he held a distinct ambivalence toward this new, somewhat unsettling, service to the island.

While still on aeroplanes...I would like to mention that in the old history of the Rotuman people, we always had a medical officer on the island. In the past, the Resident Commissioner was a doctor. Those who advocate that with the coming of the aeroplane all our medical problems [would] be solved, will be surprised to see that Government approved our doctor to leave Rotuma and come back to Fiji. He left Rotuma on an aeroplane hoping that he would go back very quickly on another aeroplane. But while he was away, a case was brought over [to the hospital], there was no doctor, and the patient died. For the first time in the history of that island, a plane was called and a doctor flew in from Fiji, but [it] arrived too late.; the patient was dead. I wanted to mention that somebody made the wrong decision and allowed the doctor to leave Rotuma. This was very unfortunate... The life of a person is very important to the Rotuman people. You will notice that when a person is sick, all his relatives come to see him, and if you do not come, you are not a member of the tribe. You have no relationship with him. [You] only know who [your] real relatives are when you are sick and when you are dead. This is something that is very strong in our lives and to just let a life go like that is something that is very bad to the Rotuman people. I stand here to express the views of the Rotuman people and hope that this would be the first and last time anything like that happened (Senate speech December 15, 1981).

### Support of the Rotuma Council and Chiefs

As Fiji approached independence in the late 1960s, and the colony was preparing for the inauguration of parliamentary democracy, the political structure that had been in place since

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cession came into question. During 1967, in order to pave the way for elected representation, the *Buli* (headman) system of indirect rule was abolished. Many Rotumans (including the chiefs) objected to the change, however, seeing it as a threat to the institution of chieftainship itself. This resulted in a serious clash with the District Officer at the time, Fred Gibson, a part-Rotuman man who had spent most of his life in Fiji. Gibson took a strong stand opposing the authority of the chiefs, who expressed their resentment in a letter to the Chief Secretary in Suva, dated 12 December 1968:

[W]e did our best to overlook his [Gibson's] harsh and disrespectful attitude to us and our people, but we now have reached a stage when we cannot tolerate it any longer. Never have the dignity and honour of Rotuman Chiefs and the people they represent fallen so low at the present moment through his administration. As we are the great defenders of our custom and our way of life, we felt it our duty to appeal for help, and get him removed.

The letter goes on to list several specific incidents in which Gibson publicly humiliated various chiefs or acted in a high-handed manner. The response of Chief Secretary Lloyd, dated 4 February 1969, was supportive of the District Officer. He wrote that "it is the desire of the [Colonial] Government that the Chiefs do not allow trivial matters or personal animosities to hinder the peace and progress of Rotuma."

The Rotuma Council sent a delegation to the Central Government. Fiji was under a transitional ministerial government at the time, with Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara serving as Chief Minister. The Rotuma Council delegation, with Wilson as translator, presented their case to Ratu Mara, who successfully took up their case. In 1970 Gibson was replaced as District Officer by A.M. Konrote, and the role of District Officer was redefined as advisor to the Rotuma Council, which was granted a much greater share of the administrative responsibility for island affairs.

Wilson's position in this dispute was crystal clear. He resented the autocratic control exercised by Government-appointed officials and believed in the Council's ability to represent the democratic will of the Rotuman people. He also saw the chiefs as the embodiment of Rotuman custom, which he dearly valued. In a Senate speech reflecting on the circumstances, he related the authority underpinning Rotuman chieftainship to that of the British Crown, to which he also pledged strong allegiance:

I come from Rotuma..., an island where the *Buli* system was not abolished in 1967. Although Rotuma was under the Rotuman Ordinance, we have a chiefly system there...and because the Central Government here in Fiji thought that perhaps the *Buli* should be abolished, this could be carried over to Rotuma as

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well, and they made a very strong attempt to abolish the *Buli* system in Rotuma. Somehow it did not work.

I want to emphasise...that a *Buli* to a Rotuman means a traditional chief. He is not a trumped-up chief working for education or something like that. He is a traditional chief elected by the people themselves... [O]ne of the strongest points in a traditional leader is his binding loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen. Of all those who have spoken against royalty in any form of Government and those who have abolished theirs, the traditional leader of Great Britain still stands fast in spite of Labour governments. There must be something very important and strong there for the common labourer not to try and disrupt it. I am quite sure that if a thorough study had been made, one very important factor that will...remain there forever is the holding and binding nature of a traditional leader. Without that the whole thing would disintegrate, and who can bind them together? No one. One of the greatest factors in a traditional leader is that even though he may not be highly educated (some of the chiefs are not), when we go back to Rotuma and there is a chiefly meeting where the chief sits down on the floor, we all follow him no matter how well-educated we are (Senate speech March 30, 1978).

In an earlier Senate session, during a debate concerning the monitoring of statutory authorities (May 6, 1971), Wilson made reference to past abuses on the part of the colonial District Officer, whom he labeled a “dictator”. He lavished praise on Ratu Mara for his support of the chiefs, and thanked the central government for “doing their job so well, and in bringing about true democracy to our little island.”

He nevertheless lamented the fact that Government initially allotted only \$648 for the seven chiefs while officials in Fiji received comparatively lavish salaries. He felt it his responsibility to persuade Government to raise the chiefs’ emoluments, and argued eloquently for an increase on several senate occasions. In response to a modest proposed raise in the 1976 Appropriation Bill, he made a case for compensating the chiefs even more amply:

On page 44, section 7, of the Operating Budget, you will find the heading “Rotuma Council Subvention”, and you will notice there a jump from \$6,745 for the present year to \$18,736 for the coming year. In the memorandum at the back, page 157, with further details, one will find under the heading of “Personal Emoluments”, particularly the head “District chiefs”, that the...figure of \$648...has now been altered to \$992..., a rise of \$344. I would like to say to the Government of today a big *vinaka vakalevu*.

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[Y]ou will recall that when we gained Independence and the...Senate was introduced, a Rotuman [Wilson] appeared in this great Chamber. The first attempt he made was to try and bump up slightly this \$648, and if you look at Hansard you will find that I made a poor attempt for several reasons. Firstly we had just changed over from one set-up, according to the old system, to a new set-up. The old system was whereby the chiefs had that great binding power which is regarded as most important to a chief or king, and once he loses that, he is no longer a chief. This is the great binding power of Her Majesty, where the different countries, even those that are independent today and have gone to the extreme of saying that they would much rather be a republic, ...have that little string attached to Great Britain and Her Majesty. The influence of the binding power of a chief or a king or queen is very important to his or her subjects throughout the world, and once this is lost there is no need to have one. Well, there was a time when we [Rotumans] had that binding power but we could not put Rotuma right with the outside world, and the only way to put things right was to hand over our little island to Her Majesty the Queen to govern. And we slipped back and became advisers to her representative on the island.

Now the role of an advisor is not a very good one. Initiative is dead; you become a messenger. You go to the Rotuma Council and hear what the District Officer and the Government of Fiji want the Rotumans to do. They come back with their list and pass it on to the Rotuman people and say, "This is what is required to be done". And...it is not surprising that when Independence came, with all this bad training, when we were told, "Now, the reins of Government of your island are in your hands. Go ahead and prove your case", that it was not very very successful. As I happened to be the one to try and raise the matter here for an increase in their emoluments, the case was not well presented, because one has to have great confidence in what one is presenting. If you should lose that confidence, you will present your case very badly, and I am one of those who, if they do not believe in it, do not feel it justified to press the point.

I regard the present Budget and the figures here for the Rotuma Council — the rise that is indicated here... — as a turning tide in the history of local government in Rotuma. The Government has now seen with its own eyes that these chiefs, who were perhaps regarded as hopeless in the old way of governing Rotuma, have now presented their case to justify the humble rise of only \$344. I do not think that they should be blamed because of the wrong training given them (Senate speech December 9, 1975).

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When the following year's appropriation bill appeared with no additional raises for the chiefs Wilson was upset, and pressed his case.

If Government were to ask what is...the most important thing that it should do to help the people of Rotuma today, I would tell them to have a look at District Administration. A breakdown of that is found on page 126 with the heading of Rotuma District Chiefs. The estimate last year was \$992; this year it is still \$992 even after I pointed out last year that it was inadequate because there are seven chiefs... I thanked the Government last year for breaking the deadlock of those colonial days when the value of the Rotuman chiefs, to the old Government, was only \$648 for all those years — a mere \$648 for the seven chiefs. Last year was the first time when the spell was broken to the tune of \$992. I was pleased and the Rotuman people were very pleased. They had high hopes, as is usual— anything that is connected with the livelihood of a person usually improves as you go along year after year; it is not static. I had a shock when I opened the Budget to look at the item and found that it was till \$992. Is this going to be the value of the Rotuman chiefs in this new set-up? I humbly beg that they be not embarrassed with this amount.

The future of the Rotuman people depends on the Rotuman chiefs. If you should hear that things are working satisfactorily in Rotuma, it is because of the Rotuman chiefs. No District Officer, no other officer could elevate the position of the Rotuman people if they are not backed by the chiefs... [W]ithout the chiefs and...their...magnetic power of pulling the Rotuman people together to work as a team in an island or as a country, it is hopeless. No District Officer could do that; only the hereditary loyalty which is embedded traditionally in the blood of a Rotuman could do that... So if you wish to help the people of Rotuma and lift them up..., this could only come through by helping the chiefs. I plead very strongly...that in the next Budget, a good look should be given to it and the sum be raised to a level which is benefiting the seven chiefs. I think if this is done, you will always have the appreciation and loyalty of the Rotuman people (Senate speech December 14, 1976).

In response to Wilson's appeal, the allocation for chiefs was raised to \$1,400 in 1978, to \$2,800 in 1980. In 1970, when Wilson joined the Senate, Rotuma's annual subvention amounted to \$640. It was raised tenfold by over the next five years, and during the period from 1975 to 1981 it rose from \$6,745 to \$49,600. This was the result of Wilson's persistence in arguing Rotuma's case, and testimony to his growing influence in the Government.

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Although pleased with the increases, Wilson was dissatisfied with the manner in which the money was dispensed. He firmly believed in the importance of local autonomy and maintained that provincial councils, including the Rotuma Council, should have a stronger say in development issues and should exercise primary control over financial resources. He therefore took umbrage over the fact that Rotuma's annual subvention was given to the District Officer for allocation rather than to the Rotuma Council.

I cannot see...why year after year the subvention given to the Rotuma Council could not be handed over to the Rotuma Council but is kept in the district officer's place...Up till today...it has never appeared on our books. There must be something wrong. Perhaps it is the district officer's subvention and not the Rotuma Council's subvention...This was all right in those far away days before independence. Now we are independent and yet the funds do not come to us. They are still controlled by the district officer. What are we to do, go and beg? ...I hope the Government will look into this and put this right because if this thing is not right then we are not really independent. We are still under the old system that we do not like (Senate speech December 16, 1980).

He also protested the fact that the District Officer maintained separate headquarters on the island rather than having his office in the Council Building "erected for the people of Rotuma," because, he said, "it would look as if Rotuma is governed by two heads" (Senate speech December 20, 1977).

Despite his preoccupation with Rotuma's financial well-being, which was clearly high on his agenda, Wilson never lost sight of his primary concern, which was that people live in accordance with a Christian spirit of love and harmony. He worried, however, that this very demeanor would result in Rotuma's neglect by the central Government.

It is true that wealth and money are very important to the livelihood of the people, but I think the most important thing is happiness, love and peace amongst people who live together. These are more important than all the wealth in the world. What is the use of having millions...when we fight each other. Often, when we have too much wealth, we are jealous of it, we keep, we hold it and refuse to part with it. And very often, it creates a lot of jealousy and we end up by fighting each other. When I mention this...I think particularly of my little place. We may not have the many millions that you people here in Fiji have, but I have heard quite a lot from people who visit my place, and they say, it is a small place, it is a lovely place where you do not have to lock your doors; you can leave your goods on the beach, go home, come back and pick them up tomorrow and you

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need nobody to watch these goods. When it is meal time they say, “Come and have luncheon with me.” And if you are a visitor they will take you home, provide you with a bed. The best things are given to the visitor, and we may not know where he comes from. This, we feel...is the most important thing in life — to love each other. I think the people who are responsible for this sort of life in a little place like that are the very people whom you seem to have forgotten year after year, by not providing sufficiently for their living conditions in Rotuma (Senate speech December 16, 1980).

The years between 1970, when Wilson first joined the Senate, and 1983, when he died, saw dramatic changes on Rotuma. Hurricane Bebe struck in October 1972, damaging or destroying most of the homes on the island. Over 300 cement, hurricane resistant houses were built to replace them. The following year the first wharf was built, allowing ships to off load and load supplies much more quickly and efficiently than before, when they had to anchor offshore. In the ensuing years a system of reservoirs, with piped water was introduced. Villages obtained grants for generators and were electrified, and in 1981 the airport was opened.

Wilson had a direct hand in all these developments. He made Rotuma’s needs known to those who could provide assistance, and used his influence in Government effectively. He negotiated loans and development grants on behalf of the Rotuma Council, and successfully persuaded the Administration to increase Rotuma’s annual budget many times over.

Wilson had strong convictions about what was best for the Rotuman people, which was the source of a personal dilemma. He was aware that his prestige at home meant his views were afforded uncommon weight in discussions, and he exercised his powers of persuasion accordingly. Yet he genuinely wanted his voice in the Senate to be that of the Rotuman majority. He therefore made every effort to keep the Council informed, to solicit opinions, to explain his actions in the Senate to the people at home. Ultimately he saw himself as a servant of the Rotuman Council who had appointed him:

It is not for me to tell the Rotuma Council what to do. It is for the Rotuma Council to tell me what to say... Of course this does not debar me from having a quiet talk with the Council because I have to report on everything that is done here. I do it. I duplicate [written documents] and they carry [copies to their home districts], and where they have difficulties I come to explain the matter properly (Senate speech, July 18, 1974).

There are those who feel that Wilson was too dominant a figure in Rotuman politics, that he may have thwarted democratic processes by intimidating those who were less knowledgeable, less

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sure of themselves. Yet there can be no doubt about his ideological commitment to grassroots democracy, or that he believed he was always acting in Rotuma's best interests.



## Chapter 6: Fiji Statesman

### CHAPTER 6: FIJI STATESMAN

During his service in the Senate, Wilson expressed his views on a multitude of national issues, going well beyond those that directly affected Rotuma. He held strong views regarding the kind of country he wanted Fiji to become, and appeared to relish the opportunity to play the role of statesman. Yet he maintained his humility throughout. His speeches toward the end of his life, though more substantial and self-assured than his earlier efforts, still retain a folksy quality. He never forgot his roots, and he took every opportunity to champion the causes of the rural poor.

#### Allegiance to the British Crown

At the very foundation of Wilson's sense of Fiji's national identity was a firm commitment to the British crown. He, himself, was very much a product of the colonial period, and although he often took issue with colonial administrators, on balance he believed that the benefits of British rule, particularly for the Rotuman people, greatly outweighed the costs. Wilson had served as one of Rotuma's representatives to the Constitutional talks in London, and was sensitive to Rotuman ambivalence concerning Fiji's impending independence. When given the opportunity to express his views in London, he voiced Rotuman apprehensions over the impending political changes.

In his maiden speech to the Senate, he reiterated Rotuman support for the Crown, but expressed confidence that under the new arrangement Rotuma would continue to prosper.

The people of Rotuma are grateful for making [independence] possible. It has often been argued that when [a small group of] people find themselves mixed up in big communities they are very often forgotten and lost sight of and very often they suffer. And it is only natural that some of my [Rotuman] countrymen should be rather concerned... For 89 years it has always been somebody else who has...fought for the welfare of my people and today I think it is only fitting that the first words said in this House should be words of thanks and appreciation for the great work that the British Government has done for us. This little place, so unique in its history, got attached to this great country of Fiji. For 89 years no Rotuman [had a voice] inside the Legislature of this country. Even then my people managed to exist, in spite of this isolation..., quite well. [W]e are deeply grateful for all that has been done in the past, and I think it would be wrong for the first Rotuman to speak inside this House to forget the great work that Great Britain has done for my little place... [I]t was very fortunate that some of our

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chiefs managed to come over to Fiji to see the association of Great Britain and Fiji, whether this was a good [or bad] thing... And it was very fortunate that when they returned they gave such a good report that by ceding our little island to Great Britain all the problems that we [had] would be solved, especially when there was no peace and harmony but only a love of fighting in this little island. We are grateful for the acceptance, all those years up till the present time. Then when this great country wanted to launch out into the deep to be independent, we were terribly scared that the good things of the past would not continue, and some of us got a little too far out of hand and did not do the thing properly and caused a lot of concern in your midst here in Fiji.

I would like to take this opportunity of asking...my good Fijian friends and the Prime Minister to forgive them for their fear of a shadow that was only a shadow, but without a devil behind it. For 89 years we have prospered and we are quite sure we have everybody here to look after our interest. And we are quite sure that in the new set-up there will be a Rotuman to help...see to the welfare...of the people of Rotuma... I would like to take this opportunity to thank the great Government for initiating such a move and for including us in this great set-up in order to show that we also have a Deed of Cession. Our little island was ceded to Great Britain and in this association you honour us with a seat in this great Senate. We hope that God will pave [the way for] this new set-up to see that we have prosperity and peace, which our forefathers could not introduce in those days, but only came through Great Britain's help... I am quite sure [independence will continue the] happiness and prosperity launched...by Great Britain, our father (Senate Speech December 8, 1970).

He was irritated by constant criticisms of the previous colonial administration from his Senate colleagues. Commenting on a speech by Governor-General Cakobau three years later, he again made his loyalties clear.

I...rise to thank the Governor-General for his historic speech. I feel that the Council of Rotuma...would like me to say, on their behalf, how much they appreciate the first historic speech by a descendant of Ratu Seru Cakobau. A lot of not very nice comments were made in this House on some of the things done [by the British colonial administration] in Fiji.

I would like to draw the attention of this House to something that was gradually taught over 99 years, whereby...Fiji will be governed in such a way that it...would be a lasting momentum of British teaching... I refer particularly to the

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old chiefly form of presenting...a policy speech of Government. I think of the 1874 policy speech of Ratu Seru Cakobau to his old form of Government of Fiji — an absolute monarchy — and one presented by another Cakobau in 1973. The great difference between the two is that one was an absolute monarch and the present one is a titular head of state. I would like to thank the British Government for teaching [us democracy], and making this teaching live in the lives of the people of this dominion, so that today a son of the great Ratu Cakobau should present another policy speech, in a different form, a form that is going to live forever. The old form of absolute monarchy is gone, [or is going], throughout the whole world. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the British Government in spite of all the bad things that have been said about them. Today we have Her Majesty ruling in Great Britain where she presents similar policy speeches. If all the things that are presented [here] are good, then not only is the Government of [Fiji] going to get [a] pat on the back, but Her Majesty is sure to share quite a lot of it...

I feel that little Rotuma would like me to say these words on their behalf. We, the Rotumans, are true and loyal to Her Majesty's government. I think the Attorney-General will bear me out that in the Constitutional talks in London, when Rotuma was given an opportunity to say a few words, we spoke and mentioned the loyalty of the Rotumans to Her Majesty and we said that if one day the people of Fiji would want to dissociate themselves from her Majesty's Government, we will drop them. I feel that it is only proper that I should mention this once again; ...this is...because of all the good things that the British Government, during the colonial days, left behind for our people in Rotuma (Senate speech, December 17, 1973).

He went on to urge Government to plan a celebration on October 10, 1974 to honour the centennial of Fiji's cession to Great Britain.

Wilson would no doubt have been saddened by the coups of 1987, after which Fiji declared itself a republic and withdrew from the Commonwealth. As it turned out, Rotuma remained with Fiji, although a number of Rotumans disagreed and protested.

### Democracy, Capitalism and Labour

The main gifts of British colonialism, in Wilson's view, were a form of government based on a strong sense of symbolic order (the Crown), a voice for all segments of the population (parliamentary democracy), and an economic system that he believed would lead to a better

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standard of living for all concerned (governmentally regulated capitalism). To be feared were dictatorships, especially dictatorships which would enslave the weak and impoverished while catering to the whims of the wealthy.

[I]n all systems of government throughout the world there are...dictators... In the great Government that we are attached to, we still have a Queen whose powers are not [one] hundred per cent limited, but [they are] limited to such an extent that we today pray and hope that she and her descendants will remain...forever. There are slight alterations made in order to make it workable to the people of today... Even in the form of democracy that we have...here, [a] few alterations are made in order to make it workable, particularly with a democracy that has big bargain capitalism to be dished out. It has to be slightly altered to make it workable. Gone are the days of slavery...when the wealthy seemed to have the motto that whatever you have, he must try and grab it.; never bother about anyone else. He regards man as an animal in order to enrich himself.

The democracy that we live in no longer has that sort of thing. It has improved; it has got a capitalism that is greatly watered down so as to make it possible for the underdog to be given a living wage...(Senate speech, June 30, 1976).

The tension between free enterprise and the rights of labourers was of great concern to Wilson. His basic allegiance was to the latter, and everything he did in the Senate was with their long-term interests at heart. In one of his early speeches he made his sympathies quite clear.

I would like to touch on the grievances of the wage earner. I would also like to thank the Government of the day for the provisions already made to look after the “have nots”, particularly in the Trade Union Ordinance. I am very very thankful in that [that] provision has been made very strong, whereby the right of the common worker and the labourer is looked after. In fact, I would say that this is the only justification of having a capitalistic system within any country. If you gag the labourer’s mouth then the system cannot be right. He has a right to fight for something to eat; he has the right to fight for something to drink; he has the right to fight for something to put over his head, for something to sleep in; he has the right to provide education [for his children] that is second to none within this dominion. But...you cannot do so with a small sum of money. Therefore, it is only fair that provisions be made where the common labourers could get together and machinery be provided whereby they could negotiate with the “haves” in

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order to get something for a decent living, without which this dominion would never be happy.

I wish to thank the Government of the day for providing the machinery to see that justice is done to the common labourer. I wish to place on record how much I support all that has been done for the common man in this dominion. I am quite sure...that any government that does not forget the small man will always be successful and will always be loved (Senate speech, November 4, 1971).

When domestic workers were excluded from Provident Fund benefits, Wilson spoke up on their behalf.

I would like to say I am rather sorry that the domestic worker is not included. Does it mean that domestic workers throughout the dominion do not require any protection in old age? Do they have to be totally dependent on somebody all the time? I have been told (perhaps...wrongly) by very good authority that the main reason for their exclusion was because of problems involved in paper work... I want to raise their little voices; they are the have-nots. When the scheme was first introduced they were pushed out. Here is the first amendment introduced [to Provident Fund legislation] and they again have been forgotten. I wish to raise their case once again in the hope that this government will look into their position...and find ways and means of introducing this great benefit to this class of workers (Senate speech, Dec. 15, 1970).

He was not a socialist, however, and specifically opposed government ownership of businesses on grounds of inefficiency.

[W]henever Government [takes] over an operation it usually ends up with too [many] expenses and in the end we have to ask for it to be written off from the central funds. This is my greatest worry. If your heart is not in the business, if you have not got a share inside it, then there is no incentive at all and you are not going to be very watchful, you are not going to put your full shoulder to back it and very often it does not work very well. Expenses go very high, but you still sit quietly and never say anything (Senate speech, April 7, 1971).

Nor did he believe that the best interests of the country would be served by the formation of a Labour Party. Rather he favoured the formation of trade unions that would provide a strong bargaining voice in negotiations with employers. But Wilson was also able to understand the position of businessmen, and did not deny their right to seek profits, as long as they were reasonable.

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Although Wilson believed it was the responsibility of Government to protect the interests of workers through legislation, he did not think social or political problems could be solved by legislation alone, or by forcing people to comply with the law. Where conflicts of interest existed, as between labourers and their employers, he preferred negotiation to the imposition of legislated regulations. The crux of the matter for him lay in establishing bargaining procedures that would be fair to both sides. The goal was to leave labourers' ultimate weapon—the right to strike—unimpaired, while making it unnecessary sufficiently often so that the country's economy would not be jeopardised. The Trade Disputes Bill of 1973 gave him an opportunity to express his views.

A great man once defined labour...as the production of wealth. Without labour you cannot produce wealth, particularly great wealth. Labour must be productive in order to create wealth. It is true that without money, the capitalist's money, this cannot be done. Both are very important and you cannot do without one or the other. Both must work hand-in-hand in order to achieve success. Where there is disunity between the two, we have a lot of trouble. In very many cases, the blame is on the poor worker; I repeat, the poor worker.

I...want to tell the good and important creator of wealth that great changes have been brought about in his sector. Once upon a time, the worker was defined as the “hewer of wood and the drawer of water.” The descendants of Ham (as in the Old Testament) were to serve the descendants of his two other brothers, Sham and Japheth. In that interpretation, the worker suffered quite a lot... Following on that a great teacher came and taught that to love God with your whole heart meant loving your neighbour as yourself... And [for] Christians of today...the worker is a friend, one who...must be treated as a human being...

[I]n the year 1833 using slavery as a form of labour was abolished throughout the British Empire, and we are thankful to those who took part in bringing about such a great change in the position of the worker. Even in our own country, before the days of Cession — 1874 — slavery did exist. A cheap form of labour was the purchase or stealing of human beings. Blackbirding was practised in the Pacific Islands, and we still have the descendants of some of these people from New Guinea and the Solomons in the sugar cane areas of Queensland and in our own country, close to Suva. But when we became a British Crown Colony in 1874, this was immediately done away with. Then the “haves” had to find a new form of creating wealth. The new form introduced was the coming over of our good Indian friends to Fiji under the Indenture System to work on the

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capitalists' huge plantations here in Fiji. In about 1916, there was a strike here in Fiji; the workers suffered very badly. There seemed to be no other way of bringing about a life that would be worth living, and they fell back on this trump card — strikes. Mr. C.F. Andrews was sent by the British Government to investigate and a report was presented. As a result of it, the Indenture System disappeared altogether...and tenant farming then came into this country, so as to make the position of the labourer a little bit better.

[F]rom the point of view of an ordinary worker..., if he wants to get a little more in wages, he has to fall back on this old trump card — strike... I agree that the trump card is not meant to be used as the first resort. I strongly go along with all my colleagues in blaming those who [have neglected to] teach the workers how to use the procedure laid down in the right way.

Quite a lot of criticism [has] been laid in the past towards the old form of colonial government, but I would like to say this much for [it]: that when they handed over the Government of Fiji they did not include a clause whereby compulsory arbitration must come in. Now, it is for us to introduce it... They have left the door wide open in favour of the workers, but unfortunately they did not teach the workers well, particularly those who should know better that this type of weapon should not be used first. I agree wholeheartedly with my colleagues that to call a strike when you do not have sugar must be very silly. I wanted to let the worker know that a lot of great things have been done for his side in order to make his position a very good one. We have even included this in the Constitution of Fiji. We allow him to form unions and have meetings because bargaining alone is hopeless. You must talk as a group.

There seems to be some dissatisfaction lately and some talk of introducing a new party — the Labour Party. Perhaps this new Party would be able to put things right for them. I wish to say...that this is not the solution. No country today or no government in the world today can say that they are 100 per cent correct, whether it be governed by one man, by [a] few men, or by the people... Even in a democracy where there are many capitalists, great changes have taken place in order to improve the position of workers... [I]f the Labour Party comes in, it cannot do without the rich people because without the riches of capitalists they cannot operate. We find this even in Australia and New Zealand now that [the] Labour party has come into power in those countries. They did not grab all the riches and put it in the hands of the poor. So, I would say...that this is not a solution. We have got to learn to live side by side.

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I would like to say a few words about the capitalists, the “haves”. No business can be run at a loss. Nobody is prepared to invest his money in any country when that is not justified. They must profit from it. Perhaps the great [problem] is: where should we draw the line? In some cases greed comes in and the profits attained are fantastic. If we can only control that then things would be better... [W]e should not let huge profits come at the expense of the poor, but we can safely say that investments by the rich must earn a reasonable profit. To earn good profit the productivity must be very high. Therefore it would be a good thing to be on friendly terms with those who are going to increase our productivity..., the labourers...

I wish to point out that in the operation of a business, particularly big business, one of the great problems faced is big expenses. Capital expenditure may be high but usually it is spread out over several years in the form of depreciation, and not charged in one year. But there are production expenses in a manufacturing industry or overhead expenses in storekeeping. The major item there is salaries and wages of workers, which is a very heavy burden that they have to bear. I would like to point out...that especially with a building contractor, when he has agreed to build something...for a certain price, he has made his calculations including costs for labour, and then after one week or a month there is a strike, and all his calculation will go wrong. He could end up in bankruptcy and I know some who have finished off in that way. So you see...the wages of labour...play a very important part in the operation of commerce and industry, and it is only natural that the rich people or the employers would try to slow down [wage increases] and not bring changes all of a sudden.

Finally..., there would be some conflict when you have two struggling— one wanting to have a higher wage and the other trying to push it down. One says the wage is not a living wage. The other fellow is paid 53 cents an hour and I am only getting 30 cents an hour. He has a wife and four children and I have a wife and four children. Therefore it is only natural that if the wage given is not sufficient the worker would press for more. Now, I would like to say that it would be wrong to press for one which would be too big [and would] kill the goose that laid the golden egg — that is, the employer (Senate speech, April 18, 1973).

The bill being debated provided for conciliation procedures between employers and employees where they reached bargaining impasses, followed by compulsory arbitration by a tribunal



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agreed upon by both parties if conciliation failed. Wilson was pleased with the concept, since he firmly believed that strikes were harmful to everyone and should be avoided. He was committed to negotiation rather than confrontation, and related his personal experience as a member of the Fijian Teachers Association to drive this point home.

For several years I was associated with a group of people...who have been striving for years to better their positions... We never had [a] strike and we have always used the Pacific way of arguing, but...it is not a very easy thing. At times we [were] almost banging against a stone wall, but we still argued and argued. Overall, the positions of the teachers today are not 100 per cent perfect, [but] I still hold, and hold very strongly, that the Pacific way is a better way — that is, by dialogue... However, I would also like to say that the worker should be entitled to live like his other neighbours and...I hope...that when we follow this procedure right through to the stage of compulsory arbitration, the position of the worker will be understood. If he is justified in having a wage rise, then [it] should be given to him. If we are going to suppress him and keep him [down] then what we all want to have in this country, which is stability, will never truly come. [Things] might look peaceful but peace that is brought about by fear is not true peace (Senate speech, April 18, 1973).

Wilson reverted to his religious values and finished his speech on a positive, sermonizing note.

I have often heard and read that Fiji is a Christian country, and if this is so, then the love of God and love for one's fellowmen is still strong. I personally...feel that...the only way in which capitalists and labourers would live side by side harmoniously [is] if one was to regard the other as a fellow neighbour, and I am quite sure that [the] portion of the cake that is going to come out from the capitalists' profits is going to be a reasonable one, providing a good living standard for the labourers of this country (Senate speech, April 18, 1973).

Always the educator, Wilson believed that the road to successful employer-labour union negotiations lay in educating union members about their rights and responsibilities, as well as in the art of bargaining. Democracy was as important within trade unions as outside. One of the main reasons for unnecessary or frivolous strikes, in Wilson's view, was autocratic leadership inside the unions. The following year he affirmed his belief in the right to strike, but addressed these other issues as well.

[W]e should not be frightened or shocked in that such things as strikes do appear in our country, because it is part and parcel of the form of Government that

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we have adopted, and to try to put a stop altogether can be interpreted sometimes as forgetting the have-nots... [A]fter all, they have only one weapon to present their case strongly and well, and that is through a strike. The only thing that I would make a special plea on is that [they] talk first and keep on talking because this is the only way in which problems of this nature can be resolved; to try and put a stop to it altogether may not be a good thing. It is true that there are some countries in the world where we do not hear of strikes; we have never heard of a strike in Russia. I am quite sure members of this House would not like to see that kind of “no-strikes” in Fiji. Since we have adopted this way of life where we have capitalist and labour[er], we should agree that now and then there [will] be some disagreement and the only strong plea that we would like to make to both parties is: let it not be rushed; let it be worked out according to the law...

I have some experience of working with the common people for several years and I could see that one of the great factors when arming workers with this weapon [the right to strike] is a thorough education of the workers concerned. I am not very familiar with the [trade union] organisations as they stand, but I feel that they require special classes where groups can come in and listen and discuss not only the Act as it is, but to listen to other good speakers invited to come and help them as they grow along in this way of life that we have adopted in this country. I feel that unless this knowledge is shared amongst the members of the unions, it will not be quite a good thing. We will then have to depend totally on one or two leaders and those of us who do not know very much will just be “yes-men”, and this is a dangerous thing, especially in a democratic society like ours. They must be taught their way of life, how to go about it according to the laws, and unless this is introduced to the unions of this country, I feel that our being totally dependent on a few is not a safe thing to do. Communication breakdown could take place between the powerful leaders and the members of the union. Therefore, I feel that this is a very important factor if we want to have permanent peace...in this country of ours (Senate speech, July 17, 1974).

Wilson’s training led him to value responsibility and service to others above the pursuit of self-interest, and he became impatient with those seeking privileges without regard for others. Rights had to be balanced against duties.

Citizens of a country speak a lot about their rights. They very strongly claim the rights that were given to them. Sometimes it is on paper, in black and white, and sometimes, according to custom it is not written. They very strongly

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claim [a right] and when it is not given to them they create an uproar... People who claim rights must never forget that there is something else that goes side by side with the claiming of rights, and that is, there are duties attached to all the rights. It is not a matter of just asking for your rights all the time, but you who are claiming it must never forget that there are certain duties. If you claim the right to elect members to Parliament, make sure that [you fulfill the] duty behind it, and the duty is that when Members of Parliament make the law, you respect it; that is your duty. Very often there is too much claiming of rights but [the people making the claims] forget the duties that go side by side with the rights. If you do not carry out your duties, then it is not right for you to claim your rights (Senate speech, December 10, 1975).

Though he could not be considered a feminist in the modern sense—he considered the role of “mother” as too important for that—Wilson was strongly supportive of women’s causes, and spoke up for them in the Senate. In a debate concerning funding for the Women’s Interest Department, Wilson not only plead their cause but cautioned men for intruding too much in women’s affairs.

I am very [concerned]...that we men try and organise women’s affairs. In Rotuma when a man marries, he leaves his home and is transferred to the woman’s home, alone on his own in a foreign land with strange people; and he dare not raise his voice. He builds a nice home for his children, and when the wife dies, he goes straight back home, leaving everything in the hands of the children and the wife’s parents.

I fear this, that we try and organise affairs that belong to the women, [and] although they are very quiet..., it is like the Fijian saying about the centipede: “*malumalumu vaka cikinovu*,” meaning “it may be a bit weak and try and run away, but be careful not to touch it or you will get bitten”...

I feel that this Department has been neglected for quite a while and it is about time that financial support is given to them very very strongly. Why? It has often been said in this House that the future of this nation is dependent on its young people and therefore we must not neglect them. We must do our best for them, because this country of today will belong to these people. If we neglect them then we will be blamed because they will not be ready to steer this country in such a way as to make it a very happy land. If the young people are so important then we must not forget that these very people were babies, and were brought to this world and cared for by the women folk of this land... We must

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make it a very strong point that the child is brought up in such a way that he will be a helper and not one that will need to be corrected all the time. The future of the child is moulded when the child is still in the hands of the mother. The father is there too, it is quite true, but most fathers leave the home and work to provide food. When he comes back in the evening, he is so tired. He sits down to read the newspaper, therefore neglecting the children. The mother has to look after the routine meals of the house and at the same time look after the children. She not only cares for the children physically but also mentally and spiritually. So, I would very strongly...point out to Government that if the women folk hold the future of this country in bringing up the child in the right way, then surely they must be given...great support so that [they] will not be blamed for bringing up children that will not be assets to this country...in the days to come. It is along these lines...that greater financial support should be given to this Department (Senate speech, December 23, 1980).

Wilson's total commitment to democracy is nowhere more evident than in a second speech he made the same day, this one addressing a debate concerning a motion to restrict off-license liquor sales. As we have seen, Wilson regarded alcohol as a scourge — a serious threat to the health, welfare and social stability of country's population. He preached against drinking incessantly. One might have expected him to welcome any measure that would limit access to liquor, but on this occasion he chose democracy and free choice instead.

I go along with those who seem to think that the motion before us, that is restricting off-licenses, cannot solve the problem. It can perhaps reduce it to a small extent or slow it down a bit, but it cannot succeed in the long run. However, ...this country is a democratic country and we go by the wish of the majority of the people... Therefore...I think that if the greater number of the people of Fiji want to drink liquor, then we cannot stop it. Breweries will be all over the place and doors will be opened wide regarding off-licenses. Laws will be changed and liquor will be sold at any time and...any place. To me...the only solution to this...is to educate our people to drink wisely, or better still, not to drink at all. I say it again, not to drink it at all. Is such a thing possible? Yes, it is possible. There are people in this world who [do not drink] liquor. They have tried it and found it bad. They read about it...

I, as an old man who cannot turn the world upside down, feel that the best way to go about it is to try not to boss someone else's household. Tackle your

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own household only. If you can win through one household, then that is a step in the right direction (Senate speech, December 23, 1980).

Another proposal that presented a problem for Wilson was that voter registration be made compulsory. The proposal was first introduced in 1971, stimulated by a concern some legislators had for low voter turnout in the national elections. Wilson felt it important that as many people as possible vote since the legitimacy of government depended on it, but he believed compulsory registration would have been premature in Fiji at the time.

I am rather at a loss as to how to go about such a tricky situation. I am definitely opposed to anything compulsory in spite of the fact that I know...it is the usual thing in a democratic country [that people of] voting age be required to register and exercise that vote. But I am definitely opposed to the introduction of such a first-class idea in a country that has just attained its independence only a year ago. We have been told that in this new set-up, this dominion status that we have attained, the ordinary citizen plays an important part in the government of his own country. I want to ask the House how many old Fijians and Rotumans know they hold such great power in their hands. It was only a little while ago in my little island that a very important person made a very strong statement in the Rotuma Council saying that if the Chairman and the District Officer agreed to [a] request, the other people...have nothing to say about it — they have no power. You can imagine yourself what happened there when we tried to tell the good gentleman of the changes that have come with this new set-up. [Democracy] is something that is very difficult to teach, particularly to the people in the rural areas. They are still used to the old old way of being governed. When they go to a meeting how many stand up to speak..? They all wait for the big people to start talking and they say yes to everything. Now, this is not something that you can overcome overnight... I, for one, know that this great disease that is referred to as “inferiority complex” is embodied deeply in people who live in rural areas. They feel that they are of very little importance, and whatever they say will be laughed at. You will find that there is always a great difficulty to get someone to take over the responsibility of a chairman or other responsible position. They all back out.

I wish to present to this House the situation that you will meet if you were to leave great Suva, and go...to the outer areas. This great “right” that you talk about perhaps is only known in this great city of Suva, [which] has registered only a small number. I take it that the general electors are found mostly in urban areas and if they registered in such a small number — they are the ones who are

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supposed to know about this “right” — then how can you expect the people who live in the rural areas to come up to the mark, especially when the disease of inferiority complex is embodied deeply in their lives. I therefore beg this House, in its first year of independence, to move slowly. Rome was not built in one day. Although we are aware of the great things that go side-by-side in modern democracy, let us not forget that the backbone of this country is dependent upon the people in the rural area. And if this is the situation...then I most humbly beg this House to slow down a bit, because I am quite sure that those great countries that you mentioned today to back up your amendments, like Australia and New Zealand, did not introduce compulsory registering and voting in their first year of independence. Let it come up after a couple of general elections. Let us teach our people first of this great right and how they could exercise this right properly in order to bring about the general wish of the people in the country. I make this special plea...for the sake of the people in the rural area, because at times their views [are] not aired very much within this House, especially amongst people who are very high up at the top (Senate speech, November 4, 1971).

The issue came up again seven years later following another dismal turnout in general elections. The proposal was for amending the Constitution to include compulsory voting. Wilson was still reluctant, and offered additional arguments against such an amendment.

Our present form of government...has only come into existence in Fiji since 1970. Wanting to change the Constitution [to] introduce compulsory voting, to me, after a trial period of only eight years...is premature, and here I am thinking particularly of Rotuma. If you wish to introduce compulsory voting, you also have to introduce compulsory registration. If this is the case, the Rotumans would have to get registered. But then when election time [comes] around, the polling stations are usually too far away, and if the weather is bad and there are no taxis and no free transport to carry people to the polling stations, the poor Rotuman who does not vote will get a shock when he receives a blue note summoning him to appear in Court because he did not vote in the last election.

...An eight-year trial period is too short; give us a fair chance... [O]ur new form of government — that is, government by the people, for the people, and responsible to the people — is something quite different from the old one... There are people, particularly those who are in the outlying islands, who know very little about this... [F]or their sake, please give us more time to learn about this new system before introducing compulsory voting...

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I think we should wait for a better time. Even the Mother of Parliament [Great Britain] is still thinking about it, and has not yet made up its mind whether to introduce compulsory voting or not. We are part of the British Empire and I think it is only right that we should have a lot of patience and tolerance. Let us think of [those] under-privileged people who may not be familiar with the form of government that we have today, and it is along these lines...that I put in a very strong plea and pray that we do not as yet agree to compulsory voting in this country (Senate speech, April 3, 1978).

### Managing the Economy

Wilson's interest in money matters extended to his concern for the national budget, which he went over carefully each year. Some of his longest speeches were in response to appropriations bills, and he often commented on budgetary line items in a number of areas. He generally trusted Government to be fiscally responsible, but was apprehensive about allowing the national debt to get out of hand. His experience with finance was confined to the co-operative societies, but he recognized his limitations.

I must say a few things regarding the budget [1976 Appropriations Bill]. Those of us whose knowledge of finance is with small finance [are] scared of high finance. We usually look at the income and the expenditure side and make sure that it ends up with a surplus..., and we are scared stiff if it should end up in a deficit. It is only the people of high finance who, if income is less than the expenditure, but who can see 20 years ahead, would be prepared to launch out in[to] the deep with loans into millions (Senate speech, December 9, 1975).

While he understood and basically endorsed deficit financing of long-term capital intensive projects, such as road development, initially he could not help but feel uncomfortable about mortgaging the future of the country. Thus, in response to news that Government was borrowing to pay back earlier loans, he cautioned:

I hear that very soon we will be floating another loan because a local loan is due to mature...and we will have to float another one to pay this one off. This will go on and on and on. We are going to create...a national debt. I have no objections to a national debt... I think it is a very fair thing that we of today do not totally foot the bill for [the] Nadi/Suva Road this year or over [the next] few years... If this...is going to be a good road, and it is going to [last] for years, let us share it, let us start today and let it be an annual thing that, as each generation

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comes in, it bears a portion of this great road development. I support very strongly a national debt along these lines. But then we are bound to strike some capital project that [will] be a total failure; what is going to happen then? Would it be fair to pass this on to the other generations [who would have to pay the price] of bad management or bad preparation today? I would regard this as a little unfair. All loans must be paid for and although we support this very very strongly (and this is a fine avenue whereby we could get all the loans required to implement the present Development Plan)..., the Government [must bear in mind] that all these loans must be paid in fine weather and in bad weather as well; [let us hope] that we will not strike a very embarrassing position when we will be called upon to pay and are unable to, [and will] have to end up by bumping up taxes inside this dominion. This is my greatest fear (Senate speech, April 2, 1971).

As he gained more experience in the Senate, however, he came to accept the logic of deficit financing and was more confident in his support of borrowing to pay for projects, such as hydroelectric schemes, that would have long term benefits.

It is always good practice to make sure that your income for your operating budget agrees with your expenditure and not to use any borrowed money from elsewhere. As the saying goes, we should cut the coat according to the cloth... Where capital expenditure comes in, very often you cannot find enough funds to meet capital expenditure and therefore you have to borrow. Several of us agree that when it comes to capital expenditure, it is right to borrow because it would be wrong for those of us who are alive today to pay the total capital expenditure to-date, thus leaving this bridge for those who come later to travel free on it, without paying a single cent. [I]t is always right to leave something behind for them to pay also. So, it is fair that we borrow, we pay a little bit and then when we die, those who follow us can keep on paying that little sum. I would like to say that I agree wholeheartedly with the way in which the Government derives funds to meet capital expenditure[s], through loans... It is quite correct that the future generations must have a share in paying up the capital expenditure involved—especially in regard to the Monasavu hydroelectricity scheme. It would be wrong for us today to pay the whole lot (Senate speech, December 16, 1980).

Recurrent operating expenses were another matter, and here Wilson took a strong stand against taking on debts to cover them.



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I have always advocated in all Budgets that the recurrent section should be totally met by the recurring income. I am one of those who disagree very strongly [with] using loans to put the operating section of the budget right (Senate speech, December 15, 1981).

Wilson also had a good deal to say on the issue of taxation. He disagreed firmly with those who considered taxation a “necessary evil,” seeing it instead as a form of communal sharing. “If it is left to us to share [the wealth] ourselves, some of us will refuse to share”, he said. “Therefore, this is the only way to share — through taxation. [Wealth] is meant to be shared” (Senate speech, May 10, 1982). Taxation was also a way for ordinary citizens to buy into the future of their country. In his eyes paying taxes was as much a privilege as a responsibility, but he firmly believed that the burden should be apportioned according to differences in wealth.

In any form of Government there are certain things that the individual [can] not do on his own. [They have] got to be done by [all who] live in a village, town or a country. How are these things going to be done? They have got to be done collectively by those who we pick to govern us. We want schools, we want roads; no single man can build a village road, not to mention a government road. No single man can build a school [on] his own; it has to be done by the people living in that town, village, island or country. We have to contribute towards the building of it. In the olden days we had no money, but we contributed our labour. Today we [use] the simple form of carrying out these duties; instead of going over and working on the road, we put our hands in our pockets, and pay out the money to the central body, which is the Government of our country, and ask them to pay people to do the work for us... If we are not prepared to pay, then we will have to go without those facilities. So I regard this as something that is necessary. You cannot do without it if you are living in a community.

Then what is the idea of saying...that this is a necessary evil? No, this is something that you must do. Everybody must be proud to contribute to the payment of things that are inside this country and are going to be done for us by somebody else; it is only fair that we contribute towards it... I feel that it is a great honour for the people of this country, right down to the very lowest who contribute...5 or 6 cents...to associate themselves [with] doing the things that cannot be done by one man but has to be done by all of us. Therefore it is a good thing.

However, the form of government [we have] does [result in] some of us having quite a lot of wealth and some less. We have agreed to have a form of

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government like this, and it is up to those in authority to see that the taxation is spread out evenly and justly between these two big lots in our country... It is not easy to do this...100 per cent correctly, and I take off my hat to the Government of the day for making a strong attempt to make it fair for everybody (Senate speech, May 14, 1974).

Making taxation fair was of great concern to Wilson, and he addressed the issue in several other speeches. He strongly favored direct taxation (income tax) over indirect taxes levied on business transactions.

As for...the great fight between direct and indirect taxation..., [t]he old form...was [based on] high customs duties [which were] passed on to the poor customer... There was once a school of thought in this great country of ours that that was the correct way of taxing—the indirect one whereby the poor became poorer through the rich paying first, [then getting it back] from the poor in their shops.

This great Government of ours has now changed [taxation] into the direct form...through taxing the earnings of the people of this land. I was one of those...who listened very carefully when the Budget came out as to whether there would be complaints from some quarters regarding this taxation. The loudest noise came from the rich people, the big business people, but I have not yet heard the poor people of this country crying...

I come from a little island where [levies are placed on copra sales]... That is income tax... The more copra you have the more your contribution; the less copra the less you contribute, and if you happen to be in Suva you do not contribute at all. But...all Rotumans who live [abroad] are owners of [family] land in Rotuma, and those who are looking after [it] are paying the taxes... The people who can afford it pay more, those who cannot afford [it] pay less. I have yet to hear of a country or a great man who would say that this form of taxation is wrong (Senate speech, December 9, 1975).

On a later occasion he struck these same themes, again espousing the desirability of everyone paying some taxes, and affirming his preference for direct taxation.

[Taxing people fairly] is not an easy job to do. You have to grab something; you have to tax somebody. The rich people do not like to be taxed so heavily and the poor people do not want to be taxed. The Government has to do it in such a way so that the poor person can live and the rich person would be...happy to keep

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his money in this country of ours. We have always talked about the “haves” and the “have-nots” and of bridging the gap between the poor and the rich.

I wish to touch on one point and that is that [the] \$130 million [tax collection] has been taken out mostly from the rich... I was one of those who insisted that we keep on paying basic tax. Why? So that the rich cannot say that we poor people did not contribute anything, but we shared in the whole thing. I am one of those advocates who say, “no taxation without representation.” There is not much good in saying, “the Government should do this or do that”, when you do not contribute to the taxation of the country. Of course, we say, there is the indirect taxation, but our name is not down. With direct taxation, you pay direct to the Government and your name is down. You are a direct payer of tax and therefore you are entitled to representation in the Legislature of our country...

I was surprised to hear criticisms being made that we pay quite a lot of taxation and that we do not seem to get any benefit out of it. I cannot believe that a statement like that could be made when a high level of achievement has been reached in our nation today (Senate speech, December 15, 1981).

### Development and Self-Reliance

Wilson was pro-development, but with caution, for he saw impending danger in the form of vices such as selfishness, greed and a slackened morality. Development should only be undertaken with a clear sense of purpose, with a clear vision of a better life for the people.

I want to touch on the great theory of change that was advocated by some people in this land. What is the change for? Is it a change for something better...or a change from good to bad? If it is going to be...change for the sake of change then God help Fiji (Senate speech, May 10, 1982).

These concerns were evident in his attitude toward tourism, which was quite ambivalent. While tourists would infuse the economy with badly needed development dollars, they might also bring some undesirable baggage with them. Furthermore, Wilson foresaw a danger to the integrity of Fijian culture. An unbridled desire for wealth could lead to commodifying Fijian customs, resulting in their debasement.

We depend quite a lot on the tourist industry just now and we cannot do without the influx of tourists. Provisions have been made [in the Immigration Bill, 1971] for them to come. Let us hope that when they come with their dollars to make use of all the hotels that we have got, they do not come naked in their

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short minis and shock, perhaps not this great city of Suva, but some of the far away islands [such as] I come from. This is the price that we have to pay..., especially in out of the way places...

It has been argued that quite a lot of these visitors come here because of the duty free shops..., but I would beg to differ with that. I feel that the reason that they want to come into this dominion is not so much for those cheap trinkets, but to see what type of people are the Fijians who have attained their independence today. I wish to submit...that the thing which is very dear to the heart of a visitor, who has not seen these things in his or her far away country, is the kind, loving, smiling life of the Fijian...today, and his ability to live peacefully side-by-side with the newcomers who have come to help develop this dominion... [T]his is the greatest treasure of this dominion. Whatever we say, whatever immigration laws we make, let us work it in such a way that this great treasure is retained forever. God help us if, in our wish to enrich ourselves quickly, we forget this, [if] we cheapen this, [if] we turn our great Fijian customs, the great Fijian dance, into something that will become cheap simply to entertain those who have come to this new dominion. [Let us not] cheapen this great treasure that God has [bestowed] on us...just for the sake of enriching ourselves ( Senate speech, May 5, 1971).

He was likewise concerned about the pace of change. In his opinion, the motto guiding development should be “slow and steady, slow and sure” (Senate speech, June 25, 1981).

Consistent with his commitment to democratic process, Wilson believed that development programmes should begin by listening to the desires of the people who would be affected. Too often in the past no such provision had been made. He was therefore pleased with the way in which the new Government’s first rural development plan (Development Plan VI, covering the years 1971-75) had been formulated.

I...rise to support the motion regarding the great plan before us, and also to congratulate those who formulated it, especially the method of its formulation. Never [before] was there a plan prepared that way. The old ones seemed to be transmitted from the top down. The experts [told] those who are down below what to do and those down below simply [said] “Yes, yes, yes” all the time. This is the first plan that has been done the other way round; it was done very cleverly. In all meetings at the village level, the experts did it in such a way that it has now swung around and become the villagers’ own ideas. I regard that as something that was very well done. If an idea that belongs to somebody else [is] passed on

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to you in such a way that you [do] not know when it [becomes] yours, you back it very very strongly, and by doing it that way...this development plan has now become the man in the street's plan... I wish to congratulate the Government of the day for preparing a plan which the villager can say today is his own..., and because it is his own plan, I am sure that he is going to give his very best to bring it into fruition (Senate speech, December 17, 1970).

Of great concern to Wilson, however, was the possibility that people would come to rely on Government to do everything for them. He admired the willingness rural people had often shown to undertake their own projects, to rely on their own labour, skills and resources. He had encouraged this on Rotuma, and frequently referred to Rotuman self-reliance as a positive example. He did so in his maiden speech to the Senate, while addressing issues raised by Development Plan VI. He warned his colleagues not to let “milking the Government cow” become a substitute for self-help.

As far as development is concerned, I would like to say this much only. It has always been man's way...to try and milk the Government cow. The Rotumans want to milk it, the good Fijians want to milk it...; there seems to be too many milkings, but this cow cannot give them milk unless it is properly fed. It needs good grass — green grass, not straws. It needs good water, not filthy water. It needs...attention... It wants to eat every day and whenever it is hungry. If we all have our way of milking the cow I am afraid it is going to be a very bad thing. This poor cow will not be able to give milk. It will probably end up by giving us blood, which will end with its death.

Now...I come from a very little place which is often forgotten and cannot get [much] of this milk. All those years...we could not get this little bit of milk, we had to create milk. This is something that we Rotumans are used to. We have to create the milk... [W]e have built roads all over the island without a cent from the central Government. [We] did not know that you had to ask for help — we just went ahead and did it. We could not wait. We have schools, and this is a very funny thing. In the old set-up the only place where education [was] compulsory [was] this little place. Now, if you introduce compulsory education you have to make sure that it is justified. Therefore, the schools must be very good schools... When we tried to apply [for assistance] our plans were [not approved by] the Education Department. [Currently] only one school in Rotuma receives assistance from the Education Department. All the other schools had to be built the hard way. We had to build them ourselves. In order to bring everybody to the

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schools, because it was compulsory education, school children had to pay £2 for six months — £4 for the year... We then had to create a bus service to carry the children free every day of the year up till today...

[I]t has been very hard, but it has worked and it is working very well. And I would like to say at this stage...that if we are going to sit down and ask the Government to do everything for us and not try seriously to solve some of [the problems] ourselves, [if we] say that Government should do this because it is its duty to do it, and we all press for this little thing...here and say that we have got this problem, and that problem, and that problem, and do not ourselves try to solve it [ourselves], then it will make this launching out very difficult, especially with this [development] plan that we have in hand. This is a plan that needs quite a lot of self-help. It needs quite a lot of action on the part of the people involved. And I am very very grateful to see that...it is called a rural plan; those people who are far away will be remembered, whom for several years past we have forgotten... I for one would not like to change...from a rural to an urban dweller, especially after I have learnt to solve some of my problems the hard way. That is, not milking the cow, but trying to solve your problems in your own way. With this idea behind [the development plan], I am sure it is going to be of great help... but if we are going to rely entirely on the great government to supply everything, then I am afraid it will be very hard. With these few remarks I strongly support the rural plan (Senate speech, Dec. 8, 1970).

Accordingly, Wilson backed any projects which would add to Fiji's self-sufficiency. In a later speech concerning development issues Wilson argued against importing things that could be produced in Fiji. While he could see the need to import wheat flour and potatoes, he was dismayed by the importation of rice, which he believed could be grown efficiently in Fiji. "The land is suited to the growing of rice," he argued; "everything that is needed to make rice grow here God has provided." If Fiji could grow sufficient rice to feed its Indian population, Wilson maintained, half of the dominion's food problem would be solved: "I feel very strongly that the first priority is food to feed the people" (Senate speech, April 17, 1973). He urged that the use of modern technology and agricultural methods be used to optimize production. When the need for irrigation to produce rice was raised in a subsequent debate, Wilson supported the project vigorously, but went further.

What about hydroelectricity? If we embarked on that project, then we could kill two birds with one stone — provide all the electric power that we will require in our cities and towns and those villages that are near it, and at the same time use

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the water to irrigate the land lower down in the valley. I am thinking particularly of the Navua area and the Navua River. I mention the Navua River in that once upon a time there was a report made to the Legislative Council about the possibility of developing hydroelectricity in the Navua River. That report said that it would be a very costly venture. Perhaps those who were in charge then were not so far-sighted, or they were a little bit frightened to launch out into the deep and start something along those lines. If they had done so we would not have been so worried about our fuel supply today. We would have plenty of electricity for lighting and cooking and at the same time the overflow from the dams would have provided water for irrigation (Senate speech, December 19, 1973).

In addition he urged that the possibilities for developing thermal energy be explored in certain areas, such as Savusavu and Kadavu.

### Co-operation

Co-operation appealed to Wilson for a number of reasons. Done properly, it not only gave members better access to consumer goods and markets for their produce, but gave people previously ignorant of business an opportunity to learn to participate effectively in the commercial economy. Participation taught them to handle money responsibly, to organize in pursuit of their best interests, and to control their own economic destinies. In short, it taught them self-reliance.

He was the co-operative societies' chief advocate in the Legislature, where they were regarded with considerable scepticism. In truth, with the exception of the Rotuman societies, which Wilson had personally nurtured, the record of co-operation in Fiji had been less than enviable. As a consequence, his speeches on the topic often took on a defensive tone, but they never lacked vigour or conviction. Co-operation was particularly important for Fiji's rural poor, in his opinion.

[T]he co-operative societies are societies introduced for the sake of the poor peoples of every country in this world. No rich person would like to join [a] co-operative society because if your share is \$1,000, you still have only one vote just like the fellow with the \$1 share. If it should go bankrupt, the person with [a] \$1,000 share would suffer more and would lose more. That is why I would like to say...that co-operative societies are formed in this world for the benefit of the poor people. Particularly in the consumer section in England you find it more on the industrial side where you have large factories and a lot of labourers working in

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these big factories. The only way in which they could make ends meet is to have the co-operative society shops where they buy goods cheaply, and that is how the co-operative society started. It is to look after the interests of the labourers. It was regarded as the poor man's business. It is found in every part of this world and I would like to say...that although it has not succeeded as far as Fiji is concerned, it has been a great success everywhere else. Those who are living here in Suva would probably regard co-operative societies as poor, weak bodies or businesses, badly run, with little capital and one which rich people do not wish to deal with (Senate speech, June 25, 1981).

Wilson also saw shared ownership of capital enterprises as a way of minimizing the gap between rich and poor in rural areas, and as a way of salvaging in the face of competitive capitalism the spirit of co-operation that permeated village communities in the past. The same principle applied when, in the face of reorganization of the sugar industry, he proposed that farmers be given a share in the sugar mills so that they would “not simply be just growers, but at the same time be owners as well” (Senate speech, April 7, 1971).

Problems with credit, management, bookkeeping and auditing were legion in Fiji's co-operatives, and the Department of Co-operatives was struggling to keep the local groups alive. A central society, located in Suva, had been established to assist with purchasing and marketing, but it, too, had a chequered history. Wilson urged the Government to provide more support for co-operation, especially by shoring up the central Suva society..

The co-operatives have put in quite a lot of money to look after their own little societies in other parts of Fiji and a portion of the money is sent over to build the central one. They have put in a fair bit of their money to show the great interest they have. But it is not that simple. I humbly beg the Government to have a look at the financial situation of the co-operatives. If you can give several thousands to save the tourist industry..., what about saving the co-operative associations, and if you save the main one in Suva, you will save the small rural societies all over Fiji (Senate speech, November 19, 1975).

The main impediment, in Wilson's view, was faulty management. Proper training was needed, and he implored Government to rectify the situation.

Right from its inception [the central Suva Co-operative] has faced difficulties—fluctuations in its operations—and Government has come to its rescue. This is because of poor management... The Rotuman people put in a huge amount to try and help the father co-operative because they believed that without a good father co-operative, all other co-operatives will never grow... But



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how much dividend or how much bonus did we get out of that? Nothing, after all these years... But because we firmly believe that unless the father co-operative is strong all the smaller ones will die off, we kept doing our best. The whole secret of it is good management at headquarters. If we get good management here to provide for the needs of the far away smaller co-operatives, we would have a first-class co-operative... Good management is very important...and I hope and pray that Government will be able to produce men who would not only know how to operate a business, but also men who would have a strong feeling of love for the people they serve. Unless they have that feeling...they will always lose out (Senate speech, Jun. 25, 1981).

He felt that he had benefited greatly from his British Council sponsored trip to study co-operation abroad in 1958, and advocated the same for other local and regional managers.

I have always tried to urge the Government and the Co-operatives Department to give opportunities to some of the officers of [the local groups] to go abroad and see for themselves how co-operative societies can be run successfully, side by side with other powerful companies. They should be sent to London to see the big co-operative societies. If you give them a chance to do that, they will come back with some good ideas, and the visit will kill the bad idea that the co-operative societies cannot exist side by side with big companies... [U]nfortunately [Government] seems to be picking only top civil servants to go abroad to be trained at the Co-operative Society College. I hope that one day they will give this opportunity to some of the secretaries of the co-operative societies, particularly officers from regional societies... They have never seen co-operative societies at their best, and they will always believe that co-operative[s] cannot be successful in Fiji. Let them go to London or Sri Lanka (Senate speech, Jun. 25, 1981).

### In Praise of Government and Defense of the Senate

All things considered, Wilson believed that the Government of Fiji was on the right track and was doing a satisfactory job of guiding the country toward prosperity. He once said that he thought of Government as the father of the people, and thought of the Government of Fiji as the father of the Rotuman people as well (Senate speech, December 16, 1980). His speeches are peppered with gratitude for Government programmes and policies that he found agreeable, and it is apparent that he found the Government during his time in office to be relatively benign.

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Perhaps even more important, however, was the idea of government itself. Although governments make mistakes, Wilson saw greater dangers in anarchy, where chaos would reign and nothing would be done to improve people's lives. He therefore was deeply committed to the Government he served, and to making it work for the benefit of all Fiji's citizens, Rotumans included. Thus, in the year before his death, he offered a parable to his Senate colleagues, who were debating a motion that would have credited the people of Fiji (as opposed to the Government) for keeping the peace and bringing prosperity since independence.

I cannot see how you could praise the people of a country for all the good things that are found [there] without including the organisation that made it possible for people to live together in harmony...

I would like to tell an old story to show the importance of having a government in a country. The illustration is something like this: A ship [was] wrecked in the olden days in [an] unknown sea, and nobody happened to know just where they were. There was a storm and it was very unfortunate that there was so much confusion. The greatness of the storm was such that everybody was swept overboard. And with the force of the winds and the waves, some died, some members of the ship got ashore half dead. The next morning when they got up they found themselves alone on an uninhabited island. The first one found the second one. He went around the beach and found another one and another one. To their great surprise not one officer was alive on that beach that day. They were just the humble crew — not an officer, not even a non-commissioned officer.

They sat there for some time and somebody got hungry and said, "How about [searching] for fruits?" Others said that it was a good idea and said, "How about you do it?" The one who suggested it said, "How about you?" The other fellow said, "Who are you to order me? You are not an officer." They went on arguing the whole morning. Another suggestion was, "How about searching the beach — there may be some food stuff swept ashore." One of the men said, "Who will do it, you? You cannot order me." Somebody said, "How about building a shelter for the night?" Another one said, "Good idea, what about you try and find something for the shelter." The other one said, "No." The argument went on and on.

Somebody suggested [that one of them] sit at a high point and if there should be a passing ship to light a fire so that [the ship's crew could] see the smoke, then come and help them. Someone said, "Very good idea! How about

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you go and do it?" ...The other said, "Oh, no, you cannot order me. You are not an officer and we are just the same." All the good ideas to make them live happily on that island failed. They sat there from morning until darkness without doing anything. Nobody [could] order anybody about...

[T]hey were all very cold, tired, hungry and scared to go [inland] in case some savages or wild beasts might eat them up, so they huddled together at the beach until the following morning. Someone said, "How about if we choose somebody to lead us. We must promise that we will obey [the one] we pick. If anyone should break that rule we will chase him out and let him find his own food and be alone in this place." They all agreed to do that. They took a vote and a leader was appointed. When the leader was appointed they began to get organised. [He gave them orders]: "You and you, go down to the bush, collect some reed[s] and start building a house close to this sheltered ground. You be the watchman up [at] that highest point of the island and watch out for a passing ship. You walk up and down the beach to see if you can find anything swept over by the waves from our ship. You, go out into the sea and see if you can find some shellfish. You start lighting a fire and start roasting anything edible that you find. When I beat this old drum by the beach you should all come because it indicates meal time." They all...did their different jobs. When the drum was beaten, they all rushed over and were so happy when there was some food to eat. Those who went into the highland came back and said there was a nice stream just by a rock and they can go and quench their thirst there. The moment they had a leader (some form of simple government) happiness was brought to that party.

Some [in the Senate] are advocating that you can bring happiness without a leader and without a government. I humbly beg to disagree with them. We have to have leaders and better still, good leaders... I disagree with those Members of this honourable House who seem to think that there is no point in giving thanks to this Government of ours, that we can do without the Government — that happiness here has been brought about by the individuals without the proper set-up of government. If prosperity, peace and stability can come to this little society it [will only be] through some form of government. If there is some prosperity and stability in this country of ours, it [was not] brought about entirely by the people themselves. It can only be brought about by a good strong government like the one we have now (Senate speech, May 10, 1982).

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Likewise, when critics questioned the value of the Senate as a legislative body, Wilson vigourously defended it. In 1974 questions were raised in the House of Representatives concerning Senate salaries. Some Representatives argued that since Senators were only part-time legislators their salaries should be reduced; others questioned the need for a Senate at all, and suggested that it be eliminated entirely. Wilson responded, drawing attention to the fact that Rotuma was not represented in the House of Representatives. He also pointed out that he had given up his teaching position to assume Senate responsibilities:

I would like to draw attention...to the importance of this House. It is very annoying to hear, particularly to a representative of the Council of Rotuma, that the Senate is not important and we could do without it. How many of those people [in the House of Representatives]...are bold enough to say that they represent Rotuma, [how many] know the problems of the people of Rotuma, [or] have paid them visits without my presence..? No one would be the wiser of the needs of the Rotuman people [if they were not represented in the Senate].

[S]ome say we are only part-time politicians... I was a teacher but I had to give it up because it would be unfair to the children I teach if I had to leave the school and come out and then go back to teach them for a little while before I had to leave them again. It would not only cause a terrible mess, but the future of those children would be jeopardised... Although others call me only a part-time politician, I would like to say...that perhaps I am more of a full-time politician than several of these people (Senate speech, July 17, 1974).

He argued for raising the salaries of senators, not on the grounds of his own considerable efforts, but because he anticipated a time when a Rotuman chief would sit in his place. A chief, he argued, would have more obligations and would require more compensation.

I feel...that the day is not far off when a proper chief of Rotuma [will] be sitting here. Would he then survive on a salary like this if he should come all the way to Suva? With me, not being a chief, it is very simple, not bad. But if a proper chief were in my place as a senator of this House, then he must act and live like a chief, with the dignity of a Rotuman chief to his people. Although they come under different constituencies, they are still Rotumans and they would pay their respect to him and he would have to reciprocate this on chiefly lines. But with a meagre salary like this...I feel that it would be impossible for him to do things that he should do as a chief. Therefore, I should rise to speak not for myself [but] for whoever would represent the Council of Rotuma in days to come.

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If he were an ordinary person like myself, I would not open my mouth ( Senate speech, July 17, 1974).

Some of his own Senate colleagues despaired over their felt inability to influence Government policy, particularly when it came to annual appropriations, which needed approval only from the House of Representatives. Wilson urged them not to be discouraged; he argued that although the Senate had no official part in shaping the budget, their voices were being heard. Addressing the 1982 Appropriation Bill he said:

[S]everal of my colleagues...have lost heart and they seem to think they are beating their heads against a stone wall and it is almost hopeless... But I must humbly beg to disagree. I have always advocated that when we keep on knocking, the day will come when the door will open. [He then gave an example - the Bau road - which was financed to the tune of \$400,000 in the budget under review. In previous years certain senators had strongly advocated making the road a national highway, without apparent effect.] So we must not lose heart, although we have very little to do with finances. Say a little piece and hope that somebody will be able to find out the truth, and the truth always wins. As far as Rotuma is concerned, when I joined this House the Rotuma subvention was only \$640; today it is \$49,600... If you are fighting for something that is quite true and justified, it will come (Senate speech, December 14, 1981).

On an earlier occasion Wilson defined the role of a parliamentarian as “somebody who enters Parliament and...does his very best in order to help the people he represents..., outside of Parliament and inside Parliament” (Senate speech, October 14, 1974). He not only lived up to that definition for the people of Rotuma, for whom he was a designated representative, but for all the people of Fiji.

## Chapter 7: Death with Dignity

### CHAPTER 7: DEATH WITH DIGNITY

Wilson Inia died the way he lived: with abiding faith, an unselfish concern for those around him, and tremendous dignity. His final illness began in December 1982, with chronic pains in his back. He returned to Rotuma on Christmas Eve, and began complaining about backaches. Susana and Betty were home for the Christmas holidays, and took turns massaging him. After they left Wilson began a regimen of Rotuman massage (*sarao*), which he credited with curing his earlier problem of limping. By March of the following year the illness was serious. Friends and family came to visit, bringing gifts of food and praying for his recovery. On March 18th, the occasion of their 36th anniversary, Elisapeti and Wilson had their last meal together at the family dining table; after that he was bedridden, the pain in his back so excruciating he could not sit.

As others learned of the serious nature of his illness, a constant stream of people came to pay their respects. They brought enormous quantities of food, and gave generous amounts of money to help the family in their time of crisis. Extracts from the diary Elisapeti kept tell the story. In it, she refers to Wilson as “Daddy” or “Dad”.

April 2 (Saturday): Kalvaka people came to visit. This is the first party to come visiting in great numbers [and brought] a pig, roosters and food... Tigarea's clan came to visit Daddy when it was his tea time... They brought cakes and food and chicken.

April 3 (Sunday): A group of Catholics led by Sister Lusua came to see him when I was feeding him.

April 4 (Monday): Sakimi, Sarote & Pak came to visit Dad. Sakimi wanted us to go to Fiji but Dad refused... Chief Taksas came to see Dad... Pak gave \$10.

April 6 (Wednesday): Noatau District came to see Daddy, bringing a pig, chickens, food, etc. All chiefs and relatives came.

April 7 (Thursday): RCA group of chairman, etc. (Committee) brought tins of biscuits, fruit, milk, etc. Malhaha District came to visit Dad bringing a carton of corned beef, food, etc. Hanuarani, Tiu & Jioje came to visit Dad bringing fish.

April 8 (Friday): Malhaha District came to visit Dad today in the evening. Taro, yams, fowls & meat. Rev. Elaisa Taito said prayer. Tua, Varomua were the chiefs among them.

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April 9 (Saturday): All Fa Hua'i [catechists] & Tuirara [church stewards] of the Western end come to visit Daddy at five o'clock, just after the Lopta party which came at 4 o'clock.

April 15 (Friday): Susana came home today...Sue brought meat, chicken, bacon, fruit, etc. for Dad & brown bread.

April 16 (Saturday): Valesi & Vamarasi brought two pigs, food. Kaurasi & Emotama & Akesa...brought buns & cakes. Toaniu also came to visit. Hapmak came to visit Dad bringing a basket full of fish, which was distributed to all Savlei.

April 19 (Tuesday): Betty flew over from Suva...brought food for Dad.

April 23 (Saturday): Valesi, Varomue, Kaurasi & Emotama, Akesa came to see Dad. They brought cakes, food and 2 piglets... Itu'muta people came to see Dad bringing turtle and fish and lots of yams & taro.

April 30 (Saturday): Aliti & Kemueli came very early bringing a fruit cake and some liver.

May 5 (Thursday): Representatives [from the western end of the island] came to visit Daddy bringing \$35.

After a month of massage by a man Wilson had selected proved ineffective, the family chose another local healer to continue the treatment. He massaged Wilson each day for a week, again without improvement, and was replaced by a female masseuse and her husband, both of whom provided treatment for sixteen days. After their treatment failed, a local subchief took over, but Wilson's condition continued to deteriorate. Several additional local healers came to massage him, but to no avail. On April 30 he lost control of his bladder, and the Medical Officer on Rotuma, Dr. Asaela, fitted him with a tube for passing his urine. Dr. Asaela urged Wilson to go to Suva for an operation, but he refused, saying that he was too old to be bothered. He said he would rather be massaged and stay on Rotuma than go back to Fiji.

On May 6 Dr. Faga Panapasa, an ex-student of Wilson's who had a Diploma in Medicine & Surgery from the Central Medical School, flew over from Suva to examine him. Dr. Panapasa convinced Wilson of the need for modern medical treatment, and called for a plane to fetch them. The following day Wilson left Rotuma, and was taken to the Suva War Memorial Hospital for X-rays, then to Tamavua Hospital where Dr. Panapasa was Administrator. In Suva a new parade of

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visitors came bearing gifts and offering their prayers for Wilson's recovery. Elisapeti wrote in her diary.

May 14 (Saturday): Many visitors came today. Malhaha Kautaunai'ga [Malhaha residents in Suva] at 10 a.m. led by Jione Erasito & Katuraf. Members came were Tonu, Kafoa, Farpapau, Vilsoni, Vilsoni, Rupeti; [they] brought 11 chickens and 2 ka'iri [kind of fish, F. saqa] & food plus a card containing \$50. After the reception at Dr. Panapasa's residence, they all came to hospital to meet the Senator personally. Harieta Katafono brought a cheque of \$50 to help buy what Daddy feels like eating...Rev. Emose Kauata thanked Daddy for what he had done for him [with] \$20.

May 16 (Monday): Harieta, Mika came to visit us; Harieta gave us a cheque \$50.

May 19 (Thursday): Yesterday's etc. presents \$100.

May 21 (Saturday): Noatau group came to visit Daddy...Cash collected \$15.

May 24 (Tuesday): Mika brought a cheque for \$300 as present from RCA because of Dad's illness.

On May 23rd Wilson was operated upon. Immediately after the operation the doctor told Elisapeti that it was successful and that they would be going home soon, but when she told this to Wilson he said he didn't believe it; he said he knew better than the doctors about his body and did not expect to leave the hospital alive. His assessment proved to be correct. He learned the truth soon after. As Betty tells it:

Well, actually, the doctor spoke to him. When he had the operation...they took the samples out and tested, and they found that he had advanced cancer [carcinoma of the spine]. The doctor called me, so I went and I spoke with him. He told me about the whole thing, and asked what I felt. I said I would appreciate it [if he would tell Dad the truth]. If I were going to die I would like to know what I'm dying from; it would be a different thing if I didn't know anything about medicine. But I thought for Dad, it's only fair that he should know. There's no point to [be told] "You'll be OK, you'll be all right," when all the time you know you're going. So [the doctor] explained to him ... Dr. Panapasa also talked to him, told him the whole thing. The only thing he didn't tell him is...how much longer it will take. But he told me, when we had the discussion. I asked how



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long, and he said at the most three months. And I said “O.K.; that’s long enough for me. I just want to make sure that his last three months are a happy three months.”

He took the news with the equanimity of a person with unshakeable faith. People continued to visit and they offered encouragement and prayed for his recovery, but Wilson took exception to their refusal to accept his death as inevitable. As Betty tells it:

The people used to come and pray in the hospital — “God please bless the medicine,” — everything to make sure he feels better. One day he said, “When you pray, please don’t say ‘please bless the medicine;’ just say, ‘let thy will be done.’ That’s more sensible...When you pray you shouldn’t say, ‘God, please do this, please do this, please do this.’ Just say, ‘you know all the things that I need, give me what I ought to have and let your will be done.’ So if he wills you to die, he will help you die, he’ll prepare you for that.”

He told Elisapeti not to pray for his recovery because it was only hindering his journey up. When, however, Gagaj Kona‘ of Savlei prayed, “If our brother is not going to live, Lord see that he has a room in your mansion,” Wilson was very pleased. “That’s the way to pray for me,” he said.

After Wilson left Rotuma a dispute broke out that created considerable discord on the island. The cause of the dispute was a disagreement over succession to the title of Maraf in Wilson’s home district of Noatau. Two factions each installed their own man, and neither side would relent. People took sides, and resentment mounted. News of the conflict saddened Wilson. He asked Elisapeti not to bring up the subject with visitors, as he did not want to discuss it. Only after Rotuman elders from Fiji came to mediate the dispute was it resolved.

Perhaps because they feared the discord was contributing to Wilson’s illness, the chiefs sent a telegram to him at the hospital on June 24th. It read:

ROTUMA COUNCIL MEETING TODAY STOP CONVEY BEST  
WISHES EARLY RECOVERY AND PLEASE BE ADVISED ALL IS WELL  
FOR PROGRESS AND PROSPERITY OF OUR PEOPLE STOP ALL  
DIFFERENCES AND ILL FEELINGS FORGIVEN FORGOTTEN STOP  
TURNING NEW LEAF BETTERMENT ROTUMA COUNCIL AND PEOPLE  
OF ROTUMA HANISIOF

CHAIRMAN

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Following receipt of the cable Wilson said to Elisapeti, "The sky is clear. I can go now." She teasingly asked him where he was going to go, but the meaning was clear. Wilson responded with a return cable three days later, on June 27:

CHAIRMAN, ROTUMA COUNCIL THANKS BEST WISHES FROM  
ROTUMA COUNCIL ESPECIALLY THE LOVE SPIRIT AMONG MEMBERS  
AND THE NOATAU PEOPLE BECAUSE THIS IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS  
STOP FEELING MUCH BETTER STOP GOD BLESS YOU

SENATOR INIA

Wilson spent much of the time he had left talking with his family, keeping his sense of humour throughout. Susana tells of reminiscing about "all the stupid books I used to read," and about the times she would read to her father excerpts from popular Mills & Boone romances. She had given him, and Uncle Josefa Rigamoto as well, one of these books to read when she was a teenager. Wilson joked with Susana: "I know why you like these books, because the girl always wins; she leads the man. The man is always doing something silly!"

During his confinement Susana passed her second to last unit for a BSc from University of the South Pacific, and Wilson was so happy he asked Elisapeti to write her a cheque for \$300 as a reward. Unfortunately he did not live to see Susana graduate.

In typical fashion, Wilson spent his last days making sure that all arrangements were made for his passing and that his affairs were in order. He wanted to make sure all his debts were paid, and since he had put down a deposit on a set of Fiji Law books, he gave money to Betty to pay off the balance. Betty related the incident, and went on to describe her interactions with him on the days preceding his death:

He said, "Please go this morning and pay the balance, and get the books out," so after school I went down to the Government buildings, paid the deposit, got the two boxes out, then I came back in the afternoon and said, "Everything's set."

He said, "O.K., tomorrow go back and bring me the volume about laws in Rotuma."

So I brought that one volume out; I brought it to him in the hospital and he was reading through it and discussing it with Mum. He said he would like her to translate the laws about Rotuma into the Rotuman language, so that the school children can understand, and hence the parents, because it's something that just sits on the shelf, and only if you're good in English can you understand.

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That was on the Wednesday (August 24th), and I brought some of his favourite foods for dinner. He stopped me from going back early, so I stayed and we were yarning until about eleven, and then I went back. Normally I don't come back first thing in the morning, but he asked me, "You coming in the morning?"

I said, "OK."

I came first thing in the morning, but I sort of had a funny feeling that he'd be going soon. When I came he hadn't eaten his breakfast, so I ate all the toast on the plate, and then I went to school. At 10 o'clock they rang and said for me to hurry back, and when I got there, his body was starting to grow cold. As soon as I walked in he greeted me in Fijian — he and I spoke a lot in Fijian. I responded in Fijian and he said to me (in Fijian), "Oh, I think I'm going to kick the bucket."

And I asked, "How do you know?"

He said, "I just feel it; I know I'm going to kick the bucket."

So I joked, "Shall I move the bucket away?"

And he said, "No, I think you should bring it closer."

I realized then that he was telling me he was going.

For the three months Wilson was hospitalised, Elisapeti was at his bedside continuously. She slept on a foam mattress beside his bed and tended to all his needs. On the night before he died he asked her to come inside the mosquito net with him. She said, "But it's so hot."

He insisted, saying, "Oh, we'll manage."

So she brought her mattress close to the bed and pulled the mosquito net over her, not realising it would be their last night together. Elisapeti described the scene on the following morning.

He didn't want any breakfast, so I did not have any either. He saw two men wheeling the X-ray machine toward his bed and said, "What is this for? Another X-ray? I'm fine, I'm strong!"

So the two men wheeled the machine away. I felt his legs and hands were cold and reported the matter to the sister and two nurses who had been attending him. Wilson wanted Luisa Veikoso, his niece to come and bring some oxygen for him to breathe. "That's lovely," he said. "Now I'm strong," but the cold was creeping fast.

Dr. Panapasa called me to his office and said, "The old man might not reach the weekend. Tomorrow is Friday. We had better make arrangements beforehand."

They called in Betty, Susana, and their husbands, Freddy and John. Elisapeti told them that when Wilson became a senator he instructed her that if he should die in Fiji, she was to ask for

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his body to be brought back to Rotuma for burial. Maraf Nataniela, the chief of Noatau at the time, knew of this and said to Elisapeti, “The place for his burial is Fafaisina, the best cemetery in Noatau, next to the RCA headquarters where he worked and sacrificed for the Rotumans. Don’t bury him at your place!”

When they went back to Wilson’s room, he was waiting for To, his favourite male nurse who shaved him every morning, and sponged and dressed him daily. When To came in he asked, “Why is the room so full?” Wilson heard his voice and said, “Bula To, mai.” To went to Wilson’s bedside and held his hand. “I’m strong, To,” Wilson said. But it was apparent to everyone that death was imminent.

Elisapeti reflected on this phrase, “I’m strong,” used so often by Wilson during his final illness.

When Savea’s second baby was born and it was a boy, he named him Armstrong for “I’m strong.” Terani Armstrong. [Wilson] used the phrase so often to the visitors who came to see him, even to his last breath. Though he was weak in body, he was strong in mind to enter the Kingdom of God. Yes, his mind was very sound and strong because not a word he said in his long illness, whether in Rotuman, Fijian or English, would show that his health was declining. That was why all the nurses gathered around his bedside, saying in Fijian, “Alas! What a real gentleman who speaks to us politely every day and bears his illness so mildly.”

Wilson joked and laughed with his male nurse, To, every morning when he came to clean and shave him. Such happy memories were left in the minds of the nurses who were associated with him in his last days.

Betty took responsibility for discussing the funeral prospects with Wilson. He reacted with typical equanimity and good humour. As Betty tells it:

He just said to me, “You ready?”

I said, “Yes, everything’s set, everything that I know you want is set.” And then I asked him, “Dad, can I take you back to Rotuma?” I had never mentioned this to him before.

He said to me, “Why?”

And I said to him, “Because I think you spent more time there; you wanted to do so much for the Rotumans. I think it wouldn’t do justice to them if I kept you here with me. I’d like to take you back home.” He said to me, “How to do it?”

I said, “Airplane.”

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He said, “What about the money!”

I said, “I’ll ask, I’ll ask.”

So he said, “O.K.”

I said, “Can I take you home to Noatau?”

And he said, “That would be nice.”

I said, “I’ll take you home to Noatau, near the RCA.”

Then he said, “OK, I’m ready to go.”

All this discussing was going on while they were busy massaging him because his circulation was bad and he was going cold. It was nearing the end. But you know, talking about these things didn’t make him unhappy. What I wanted to get across to him before he died was what I was going to do with him. So that at least he had some knowledge. He went happy, not like a lot of people who don’t know where they’re going to be buried, or who’s going to look after them, who will come and look after their grave — that sort of thing. So when he died, all the negotiations just flowed through — no hitches at all. Sometimes people say that if the person who’s died doesn’t agree, everything’s hard — you can’t get the plane, things go wrong. but not in his case. Everything went right through, there were no hitches. So when he died I was at peace, very much at peace. If he had died a sudden death, we would have regretted a lot ..; oh, I wish I had done this, I wish I had done that.

Following this discussion with Betty, Wilson told Elisapeti that before he drew his last breath she should write a cheque for \$4000 to cover the expenses for his funeral. “Not after I’m gone,” he teased, “because that would be illegal; we have a joint account and if I am dead the cheque won’t be any good.” While Elisapeti was putting her signature on the cheque, her son-in-law called her to Wilson’s bedside, just in time for her to utter a brief prayer: “Dear Lord, to your loving hands I commend his soul.”

Her diary entry the day of his death was short.

August 25 (Thursday): He passed away at 2:00 p.m. My Darling Husband, so loving to all, passed away peacefully and serene. May God give him rest and peace.

Wilson’s body was taken to Betty’s home in the Raiwaqa section of Suva. Elisapeti documented the days that followed in her diary.

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August 26 (Friday): Today, all the relatives came to pay their last tribute to Dad. They came in *la'os* [groups], just as they did last night... All the nurses & doctors of Tamavua came.

August 27 (Saturday): Today is spent like yesterday. Fotfiri & her children came bringing a good *te hapa* [fine mat] for Dad to be used for his burial & \$100. {Mereseini Tabua} Brown came. Another party from the Prime Minister's office brought 2 *tabua*. Sue's two friends brought mats & money: \$33. Akata & Pasirio's children brought \$150 and a card.

I told Sue to give \$100 for the choir collection as a memory for this year. Faga [Panapasa] said Dad's body is to be embalmed for Monday's flight [to Rotuma].

August 28 (Sunday): All relatives came to Raiwaqa in the morning and stayed till night. All DTTI [Davuilevu Teachers Training Institution] old students...[came] to pay their last tribute to Dad. Old Richmond scholars came. The Soqosoqo ni Marama represented by Kuini Naqasima [the first Fijian to become a matron in the CWM Hospital], Marama Sovaki & Vani; also Josefata Kamikamici and his wife Esiteri. All Fijians at No. 1 and Raiwaqa came also. The people of Veiuto, too, came at Midnight.

August 29 (Monday): The House of Representative Members & Senators came to pay their last tribute to Dad at 10 a.m. and all other relatives came from 8 a.m. when the coffin was brought from the Mortuary till the time when the coffin was closed. The choir sang beautifully outside till the coffin was taken. We were escorted by the Policemen [&] the Ministers to Nausori. At the airport, Hon. Seuesa Sikivou, his wife Bulou Salote, Mereseini Tabua [Brown] and her husband Asivorosi and other friends awaited us in the VIP lounge. The coffin was laid there for an hour as the plane was delayed. The Suva choir sang hymns and anthems from the next room all the time until we boarded the plane for Rotuma. [The chartered plane] left at 3 p.m. & arrived at Rotuma at 5 p.m. Airport was full of people welcoming him in singing & tears. What a sad welcome, though everything was beautifully planned.

Two planes were chartered, one by the RCA, the other by the Inia family. On the following day another chartered plane brought officials of the Methodist Church.

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August 30 (Tuesday): Last night all Rotumans in turns came in to the coffin from evening till dawn to pay their last tribute to Dad at Savlei. The chartered plane arrived late at 11:30 am. Rev. Inoke couldn't make it so Emosi Vuakatagane, the Vice President, came instead with Rev. Lagi, Rigamoto, Deaconess Olovie, Kemueli & Sagaitu. The burial took place at Noatau. The coffin was taken by Maka' way [around the north side of the island, through Malhaha and Oinafa]. We arrived at Noatau Church and saw the church was really full.

Rev. Erone Tomasi started the service. Speeches from different sections — but what Senator Vakalalabure said really touched my heart. All speeches were always saying how good and humble he was. Speakers - Gagaj Maraf, Gagaj Saufo'ou, Minister Jonate Mavoia, Senator Vakalalabure, Josefa Rigamoto, Dr. Faga Panapasa, Rev. Jione Lagi. The service was over by 3:30.

The Procession to the cemetery was really in true Rotuman way to a High Chief; perhaps more - to a *sau* [king].

Funeral Feast was held at dusk in a real traditional way - 16 *faufono* [baskets of food accompanied by a fine and ordinary mat]. They came from the 7 district chiefs, the Honourable Jonate Mavoia, Senator Vakalalabure, Ratu Ebose Vuakabagane, Rev. Erone Tomasi, Rev. Jione Langi, Josefa Rigamoto, Dr. Panapasa, Fesaitu [the catechist of Churchward Chapel], and Firipo Nakaora [the District Officer].

September 27 (Tuesday): Delivered a speech re Dad's career. 1 Cor. 16. 13-14. Be alert, stand firm in your faith. Be brave. Be Strong. Do all your work in love.

October 2 (Sunday): This is our beloved husband, father and grandfather's 75th birthday, but he died on 25th August and never lived to have reached this great day. This day was Mahatma Gandhi's birthday also. Our Dad and Grandpa was a real Gandhi to Rotuma. Because of his greatness to us I proposed to give \$750 dollars to help [the district of] Itu'ti'u put up a ceiling to Itu'ti'u Hall for his 75th Birthday.

The diary ends here, but the eulogies continued. A particularly poignant one comes at the conclusion of Rupeti Vaivao's "History of the Rotuman Co-operative Association":

Generally speaking, I would say that the Co-operatives and Mr. Inia have played a major part in the life of the Rotumans by bringing together the people of Rotuma in a civilized way. Co-operatives and Inia have developed not only the

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economy of the Rotumans but also the social life of the community as a whole. Today, through Co-operatives, the Rotumans may be said to have been able to match in some measure the progress made by other communities in Fiji . . .

Nature had given the Rotumans a man with a sense of responsibility, vigorous and comprehensive, which in his riper years, he had cultivated with care and industry. His general knowledge was extensive and various; in that of his own profession he was unequalled.

He had a clear judgment, a strong masculine sense and the most determined resolution; with a genius peculiarly turned to enterprise in 1953, he had pursued his object with unshaken perseverance, vigilant and active in an eminent degree.

Mr. Inia was cool and intrepid among dangers; patient and firm under difficulties and distress; fertile in expedients; great and original in all his designs; active and resolved in carrying out his duties, more particularly to the poorer.

In every situation he stood unrivaled and alone; on him the Rotumans looked with hope.

He was our leading “Star” of this century. With his departure, it was as if our faith and hope had gone, but the example of his life and dedication to Rotuma remains with us, and that will surely give us the confidence to continue his work (Vaivao n.d.).

Among the tributes he received from his fellow senators was a speech by his successor from Rotuma, K. Petero, who commented that “the late Senator Wilson Inia...was a man that held strong to his principles of love for his countrymen and to pursue the goal of upgrading the living standards of his countrymen.”

A Fijian senator called Inia “a man of dignity . . . who was always proud of being a Rotuman.” He remarked that to him, “Senator Inia is Rotuma and Rotuma is Senator Inia. To define the race in Rotuma, you look at Senator Inia and his is the best and glowing definition of Rotuma and his people” (Parliamentary Debates, August 29, 1983).

### Legacy of a Leader

Wilson Inia dedicated his life to public service, and did so with grace, integrity and courage. He aspired, as much as any individual I have known, to the virtues of the “golden mean.” He was a devout Christian who advocated respect for others’ religious beliefs, a moralist who recognized the rights of others to make their own moral choices, an idealist with a strong practical bent, and a romantic who blushed at impropriety. He was frugal without being stingy; dignified, but with a keen sense of humour. As a father, teacher and business manager he was a



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strict disciplinarian, but he believed punishment should never be fortuitous, that it should always serve to teach a lesson. He was a strong leader who valued humility, a democrat who recognized the importance of strong leadership. He vigorously advocated respect for law, but condoned breaking rules when they were harmful to the public interest. He advocated development, but believed in preserving cherished traditions.

Leaders of Wilson's calibre are rarely loved universally, and he, too made enemies. On Rotuma, despite the fierce loyalty he inspired in the large majority of people, there are those who do not cherish his memory. Many of these are individuals who had been expelled from the co-operatives for mismanaging funds or violating RCA rules. Wilson would only forgive so much; he was not afraid to impose strong sanctions when he believed they were deserved. When he thought people were being intentionally dishonest he could be very severe in his judgment.

Retrospectively he is sometimes criticized for failing to groom a well-trained successor to take over leadership of the RCA, implying that he jealously guarded his control. However, when Elisapeti asked him during his final illness who would replace him should he die, he replied, "I taught them everything that I know; nothing is left untold. Rave Fonmoa and others can manage without me."

Some conservatives argue that he ruined Rotuma by placing too much emphasis on the importance of money — that this acted to undermine fundamental values of sharing and community. There are also a number of Rotumans who resented the ways in which he used his power and influence. They felt bullied by him, claiming that despite his democratic ideals, he sometimes pushed so hard to get his way that he ran roughshod over others, including the chiefs. Some feel that he used his education as a weapon of intimidation. There is no doubt that he firmly believed he knew what was best for Rotuma, and at times was willing to step on toes in pursuit of his vision.

For these reasons, and perhaps because Rotumans resist elevating any of their own above the rest, he has not been honoured as much as one might expect. While his portrait occupies a prominent position in the main co-operative store in Noatau, the high school shows no signs of recognizing his role in its creation, when one might well expect it to bear his name. Elisapeti reports that at one point the Chief of Malhaha proposed in Council naming the high school for Wilson, but nothing came of it. Reverend Lagi suggested naming the assembly hall at Churchward Chapel in Suva after Wilson, but his detractors would not have it. The hall remained nameless despite other suggestions, since there was no one those present would unanimously endorse.

The importance placed on consensual decisions makes honouring Rotuman heroes difficult. If a building or institution is to be named for someone unanimity is required. A failure to achieve consensus is believed to invite ill-fortune, since lingering resentments are thought to be a

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source of bad luck. It is therefore no wonder that the only Rotuman buildings named for people are named for non-Rotumans. The Churchward Chapel is named for Reverend C. Maxwell Churchward, an Australian missionary who spent many years on Rotuma and translated the Bible. Karuru Maternity Clinic on Rotuma is named after Enele Karuru, a Fijian Medical Officer who served on the island with distinction. The only other institution named for someone is the Raho Co-operative, named after a mythical figure who is credited with bringing the island of Rotuma into existence.

The importance of family and factional loyalties also creates a problem for the Rotuman sense of history. When I have asked Rotumans whom in the past they admire most, they have invariably answered by naming their own immediate ancestors. None were named for what they contributed to the Rotuman people as a whole, or for what they accomplished; the reasons given were always personal. It is what he or she did for them or their family that mattered. There seems to be little concern for the history of the Rotuman people as a whole.

Despite this lack of formal recognition, Wilson's influence on Rotuman history has been profound. The recent achievements of the Rotuman people, and they are many, owe a huge debt to the respect for education he instilled in several generations of students. They went on to become teachers, ministers, doctors and government officials. So did many of his Fijian and Indian students. According to Elisapeti, Wilson often said that one of his greatest rewards in life was to meet his ex-students — Fijians, Indians and Rotumans — who had risen to high places in the professions, firms, banks, church. He delighted in meeting young women whom he had taught bookkeeping keeping accounts in the shops of Suva.

And whatever its ultimate fate, the Rotuma Co-operative Association has impressed upon successive generations of Rotumans the importance of learning financial responsibility. As a result, the Rotuman people have been much better equipped than many other Pacific Islanders for adapting to the modern economic system.

In an important sense Wilson Inia established a new model for leadership on Rotuma, based on competence in three cultures — Rotuman, Fijian and English — and an ethic of selfless service. His death left a void that has yet to be filled.