

Youth, Women & Elections

By NFP President Tupou Draunidalo

(continued from last week: Excerpts of her speech at NFP Convention)

Promotion of youth and women

As both, a woman and a youngish one – I have a lot to commend the NFP. The party has had many women members and group leaders. And the party has always sought more members and participation from these two groups.

We are hopeful of attracting very many from this sector to contest the upcoming elections under the NFP banner.

As I said at another party meeting, this is the party that had Irene Jai Narayan as party president in the 70s then Adi Kuini Vuikaba as a coalition leader in 1990-91 – that is some time before women's rights took a more central place in the discourse of this conservative and male-friendly country.

But as a party, we cannot rest on those laurels and the appointment of another woman party president – we can and we should do more. We led the way back in the 70s and we should lead the way again now to push for more independent women of substance in our ranks as candidates, office bearers and leaders.

Further, we should actively court and engage the young who need to get better connected to the political history of Fiji so as to prepare themselves better for the rebuilding task that lies ahead.

It is the youth who will take all of our hopes and dreams into the future and so we must involve them now in very substantive ways. As my own mother did with me – baptism by fire never did harm anyone.

Bridge between the educated and the community

Another attraction to this party has been how it is a bridge between the professional sector and the wider community.

One or two persons may make snide remarks about this party being a party of 'elites' due to the membership and support of very many professionals – but I truly cannot understand why the membership of professionals would be a bad thing.

Between you and me – I would rather an Economics Professor like Biman Prasad telling us about the national economy and related policies than a soldier. If we

went to the hospital, I'm sure we would all prefer to consult the doctor and not a bone crusher.

Further, many high achieving professionals who have led this party had very humble beginnings and so their own personal stories of beating the odds to rise to national leadership should give our citizens hope for a better future.

I have it on very good authority that our former leader, Mr. Siddiq Moidin Koya (the son of a cane farmer) left school at class 6 at Ba Mission School. He never enrolled at a secondary school but he worked hard as a law clerk and cut cane himself to save enough funds to see him through law studies overseas and the rest as they say is history.

Maturity

At fifty, the NFP shows its class – a fine history of service through dialogue and partnership with other political parties (ALTO, ALTA, 1970 Constitution, FNPF, Housing Authority, 1997 Constitution) and selflessness (both the party and its members). I like that style very much. Dialogue and understanding are sure ways to win allies and in a polarised state like ours – those qualities are rare jewels.

Let's tell Fiji more about who and what we are and why Fiji needs very many NFP parliamentarians.

AG & proposed Party

The Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum must resign as Minister Responsible for Elections following his appointment as General Secretary of the proposed Fiji First Party.

Mr Sayed-Khaiyum has clearly compromised his position as Minister Responsible for Elections by becoming an office holder in the proposed party. This is in conflict of interest with his ministerial position.

Government, particularly, Mr Sayed-Khaiyum have through the 2013 Constitution and Political Parties Decree unfairly discriminated against trade unionists and trade union workers by classifying them as public officers when they are paid privately through funds of union members.

They are prohibited from becoming members and officials of political parties or even attending political meetings. Any violation of the Political Parties (Amendment) Decree of 2014 by unionists carries a fine of \$10,000 or a term of imprisonment of 5 years. They have to resign their union positions to be involved in politics.

However it seems Mr Sayed-Khaiyum has become the law unto himself. He is preaching to the rest of the country to walk the moral high ground in terms of transparency and accountability, yet he violates these principles with impunity.

The September 17 general elections will lose all semblance of being free, fair and credible, if Mr Sayed-Khaiyum chooses to deliberately ignore the fundamental principle of declaring his interest in the preparatory work and conduct of elections, and continue holding both positions of Minister Responsible for Elections and general secretary of the proposed Fiji First Party.

He must resign as Elections Minister immediately because he accepted the political appointment.