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## RAPA NUI

Politics on Rapa Nui during the review period focused mainly on the organic law bill for the future special administrative status of the island. The bill was subject to continuous debates, until being finally introduced in Congress in a watered-down version. On the local political scene, the established politicians are clearing the way for a new generation of leadership, some very reluctantly, others more freely.

The process of replacing the political elite started in early June 2007, when pro-independence opposition leaders Mario Tuki and Raúl Teao won the highest numbers of votes in the elections to the Easter Island Development Commission (Gonschor 2008, 242). This electoral success boosted the ambitions of the opposition leaders, and their next campaign aimed at unseating veteran community leader Alberto Hotus from the presidency of the Council of Elders. Hotus, who is politically affiliated with the Chilean ruling center-left coalition, claims to hold the presidency of the council for life, even though this claim has never been universally accepted and has been an issue dividing the community for the last two decades.

The dissidents subsequently called for an election of the council's presidency, which was held in late August in semi-official fashion in a Hanga Roa school building. The three candidates were Mario Tuki, Leviante Araki, and Agterama Huki, all of whom are known for their pro-independence position and their bitter opposition to Hotus. The election was won by Tuki, but only a minority of about 200 voters participated. Alberto Hotus refused to participate or even acknowledge the election. When Chilean President Michelle Bachelet visited Rapa Nui for the annual ceremony commemorating the 1888 annexation of the island on 9 September, she was greeted by Hotus, presenting himself as the president of the Council of Elders. However, Tuki protested and tried to interrupt Hotus, arguing that it was he, Tuki, who was in fact the legitimate president following the election (TRN, undated article circa Sept 2007).

Many observers questioned the purpose of the election. In fact, neither Hotus's nor Tuki's interpretations is in line with the original purpose of the Council of Elders, which was to consist of the eldest representative of each family name existing on the island. These family representatives would then elect one among them as president. There is no basis for claiming the presidency for life, nor does it make sense to elect the president by popular vote. Furthermore, the position of president should not be that important in relation to the whole council, which is supposed to be a collective organ, representing each family. Shifting the focus to the presidency is thus a manipulation for political pur-

poses and a distortion of the council's intended function.

While factional political struggles continued with less intensity, the reform process of the island's political status was also slowly progressing. A constitutional reform to create the category of "special territories" outside the normal Chilean administrative system was passed on 5 June 2007 after being stalled in Congress for two years. President Bachelet signed the reform into law on 27 July, clearing the way for an organic law to specify a system of administration for the island (Gonschor 2008, 242). However, the process of drafting that bill was far from complete.

Over a period of several months during 2006, community workshops had produced a draft bill that was presented to the public in January 2007. This draft bill, which was extensively analyzed in last year's review (Gonschor 2008), proposed an island administration headed by a Santiago-appointed governor and a locally elected council with strong powers of control. It reserved both governorship and council membership to ethnic Rapanui. It also created a commission appointed by the Council of Elders to take over the management of all public lands from Chilean government agencies (Government of Chile 2007a). At the time of my visit to the governor's office in July 2007, Governor Carolina Hotu still considered this draft to be the basis for the final bill (Hotu, pers comm, 17 July 2007). But earlier, in a 28 February letter to Claudia Serrano, the undersecretary for regional development and administration, Mayor Petero Edmunds had complained about the community

draft, arguing that the proposal was anathema to the national unity of Chile and also racially discriminatory because of the reservation of key offices for native Rapanui (Edmunds 2007). This move by the mayor—criticizing the draft from a pro-Chilean perspective—came as quite a surprise. In two interviews given to Chilean and Argentinean journalists in December 2006 and January 2007, Edmunds had advocated a diametrically opposed position—one that was radically autonomist if not pro-independence—calling for the island to be decolonized and freed from Chilean rule (El Ojo Digital, 26 Jan 2007; TRN, Nov 2007). The mayor's vehement opposition to the community draft was probably due to the prominent participation of the local opposition in its making. He felt that his status as mayor was not properly acknowledged, as he explained in a later interview (TRN, 27 May 2007).

Although President Bachelet confirmed her approval of the special statute bill during her visit on 9 September (Noticias Correa, 9 Sept 2007), and there were rumors that the bill would be introduced in Congress before the end of the year, nothing happened for a long period. Apparently the Chilean government took the mayor's objections seriously, and another draft bill, prepared by the Ministry of Interior, was released in September 2007. In contrast to the community draft, the ministry's version contained no offices reserved for ethnic Rapanui; replaced the name "Rapa Nui" with "Easter Island"; increased the power of Santiago-appointed officials in relation to locally elected institutions; and deleted the paragraphs pertaining to the

reorganization of land tenure (Government of Chile 2007b).

With the two strongly different versions circulating, endless discussions on the final draft followed. On 17 December, Undersecretary Serrano visited the island and met with Governor Hotu, Mayor Edmunds, Hotus from the Council of Elders, and the five elected members of the Easter Island Development Commission to discuss the new version of the bill and win their approval for it (SUBDERE, 17 Dec 2007). However, in contrast to the undersecretary's visit in 2006, there was no community participation in the meeting.

In the months following Serrano's return to Chile, no visible action took place regarding the bill. Public attention focused once more on the local political scene. Mayor Edmunds continued to attract attention with contradictory statements and erratic moves, such as his sudden shift from an anticolonial to a pro-Chilean position the previous year. Edmunds and the intendente (regional administrator) of Valparaíso region, Ivan de la Maza, had a strong falling out in June 2007, accusing each other of broken promises and inaction (RNJ, Oct 2007, 165). In early 2008 Valparaíso regional councilor Enzo Muñoz wrote a letter of complaint about the mayor's lack of performance (TRN, undated article). In May, Edmunds announced that he would not seek reelection in the municipal elections scheduled for October 2008. This was later confirmed by the Christian Democratic Party of Chile, of which Edmunds used to be the local candidate. The party endorsed Luz Zasso Paoa, the only female member of the Easter

Island Development Commission, as their new candidate for the mayoralty (TRN, undated article).

Edmunds's outspokenness also created uproar on another occasion. On 26 March 2008, Finnish tourist Marko Kulju broke off the ear of a moai (megalithic statue), a crime for which he was arrested, fined US\$15,750 and banned from Rapa Nui for three years. The mayor publicly stated that one of Kulju's ears should be cut off as an appropriate punishment (RNJ, May 2008, 77; TRN, March 2008).

The occasional vandalism exemplified in Kulju's case is only one of the problems intensifying with the growth of mass tourism. The number of visitors, presently estimated at about 50,000 annually, is increasing by 20 percent every year, a development that causes not only satisfaction but also increasing concern among the Islanders. During the review period, a new luxury hotel named Posada Mike Rapu opened its doors, and several more are being planned. Edgar Hereveri, president of the island's Chamber of Tourism, expressed concerns that the appropriate infrastructure is lacking to accommodate more visitors and warned that the island had collapsed once before—referring to the collapse of ancient Rapanui culture in the seventeenth or eighteenth century due to overpopulation and depletion of resources (RNJ, May 2008, 76–77).

As a result of the tourism boom, and the accompanying mass influx of migrants from Chile, observers see the cultural heritage of the island as increasingly endangered. While some Islanders are very defensive about their cultural identity, others are becoming

increasingly westernized. Confronted by a mix of ideas from Chile, the United States, and other Polynesian islands, the Rapanui “cannot agree on whether they should follow in the footsteps of Tikopia or Las Vegas,” as one critical voice put it (Shawn Mc Laughlin, in *RNJ*, May 2008, 67).

In December 2007, the island tragically lost one of the bearers of hope for the future of its heritage, when Clemente Hereveri passed away at age thirty-two. Hereveri was one of the most proficient experts of Rapanui language, culture, and oral history among the younger generation. He had studied archaeology in Chile, served as the secretary of the recently formed Rapanui Language Academy, and worked for the defense of indigenous rights throughout Chile. He was also a leading participant in the discussions about the special statute bill (*RNJ*, May 2008, 79).

Toward the end of the review period, the issue of Rapa Nui’s status came up again. From 5 to 6 May 2008, a Chilean government delegation visited the island in order to present the latest government draft version of the bill. They discussed it with local political leaders in Governor Hotu’s office, to prepare for its impending introduction in Congress. During the meeting, participants made proposals for modifications and in the end agreed on a list of additions to perfect the bill (*SUBDERE*, 12 May 2008). On 4 June, the bill was finally completed and sent by President Bachelet to the Chamber of Deputies (Government of Chile 2008), where it was formally introduced on 2 July (*SUBDERE*, 3 July 2008).

The current bill, more similar to the

Ministry of Interior draft than to the community draft, can be summarized as follows: The current province of Easter Island, subject to the Valparaíso region, will be abolished and replaced with the Special Territory of Easter Island, directly dependent on the central government in Santiago, and no longer part of any region. The insular administration will be headed by an island governor, appointed by the Chilean president, with prerogatives similar to a regional intendente (articles 2–3). Qualifications for the island governorship include two years of residency in the territory prior to appointment (article 4), but do not include Rapanui ancestry or knowledge of the Rapanui language, as in the 2007 community draft. All government agencies on the island, both those of the insular administration and those depending on metropolitan Chilean government departments, will be under the authority of the governor (articles 13–23; 37–39). The island governor will be assisted by, and preside *ex officio* over, an Island Development Council consisting of six elected members, four of whom must be ethnic Rapanui; the president of the Council of Elders will also serve as an *ex-officio* member, along with the mayor, who has a right to speak but not vote (articles 24–29, 48–49). The council’s main prerogatives will be budgetary appropriations and confirmation of votes on projects proposed by the governor (articles 21, 30, 43, 46). In contrast to the provisions of the 2007 community draft, the council will have no powers to initiate the governor’s removal from office or to confirm his appointments of civil servants. The presently exist-

ing municipality, with the elected mayor and six councilors, will remain structurally unchanged, but it will be dependent on the island governor's office instead of the Valparaíso regional administration. However, its administrative responsibilities will be increased (article 67).

Special attention is given to the protection of the Rapanui identity and cultural heritage, which the governor has an obligation to protect (articles 1, 11, 15a). The Council of Elders is recognized as a legitimate local institution with advisory powers in all matters pertaining to Rapanui culture and language (articles 51–52). Furthermore, the bill creates a Rapa Nui Lands Commission, to be formed in place of the present Easter Island Development Commission, which will be disbanded (article 76). Composed of the governor (who will preside *ex officio*), five elected ethnic Rapanui councilors, the president of the Council of Elders, a representative of the Chilean Ministry of Public Lands, and the local representative of the Chilean Office for Indigenous Development, the Rapa Nui Lands Commission will supervise the administration and use of Chilean state-controlled lands and coordinate grants of land title to Rapa Nui families (articles 53–58).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that while the 2007 community draft was already a compromise between Rapanui calls for autonomy and Chilean claims of centralized authority, the 2008 bill represents an extremely watered-down version of the original proposals for a genuine statute of autonomy made by Mayor Edmunds and others in 2002–2003 (*RNJ*, Oct 2003, 150). As such, the bill

is not likely to either solve the island's administrative problems or satisfy the Rapanui's demands for autonomy. The bill severs ties with Valparaíso region and places the island directly under Santiago, but the relationship between the island community and the Chilean-appointed government apparatus remains essentially the same. With the powerful chief executive still appointed rather than locally elected, it is difficult to see the statute as one of internal autonomy. In addition, the bill increases rather than reduces bureaucracy, by creating new institutions but failing to abolish existing ones. The continuing existence of two parallel administrations—the municipality and the governor's office, each with its own elected council, executive head, and numerous supporting staff—seems absurd for a community consisting of only one settlement with a few thousand inhabitants.

One must wonder why the island cannot follow the example of all other dependent but internally autonomous Pacific Islands territories such as French Polynesia, American Samoa, Norfolk Island, or Tokelau. Each of these territories has a local government consisting of an elected assembly and an elected chief executive, responsible for all local affairs, while the metropolitan executive government is represented by a high commission (French Territories), administrator (New Zealand and Australian territories), or a federal office (US territories) to administer its sovereign prerogatives. A similar arrangement was advocated for Rapa Nui in one of the earlier draft proposals (*Hacia un Estatuto de Autonomía para Isla de Pascua* [2003]), but apparently no

Chilean legislator even took up this idea. With no elected local chief executive in existence to represent the island internationally, it seems that Chile, despite all the apparently liberalizing measures of the last few years, is still determined to prevent Rapa Nui from taking its rightful place in the Pacific region as, at the very least, an internally self-governing political entity.

Finally, the bill says nothing about controlling immigration to the island, and the issue was not taken up during its preparation, even though this was one of the most important points of concern raised in the 2006–2007 workshops. The immigration issue had therefore been included in the community draft as another piece of legislation to be prepared in parallel. If the Chilean government is really committed to the “preservation of the identity of the Rapanui people” as it states in article 11 of the bill, something must be done soon to stop the uncontrolled influx of Chilean settlers that as of a few years ago had already turned the Rapanui into a minority on their own island.

In summary, if the present bill passes, it will certainly count as a first step in the right direction. But in order to create a meaningful autonomous government that can address the island’s long-term needs, much more substantial political reform will be necessary in the near future.

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## SĀMOA

During the year in review, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) maintained its dominance over the unofficial minority parties. However, the introduction of several controversial policies led to some fragmentation of the party following the defection of two HRPP stalwarts. With the breakup of the Samoa Development United Party (SDUP) the previous year, there was no official opposition party in the Samoan Parliament, so effective opposition to government measures was missing. The year may be described as one where the Human Rights Protection Party, principally through its leader, the effervescent Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, attempted to test the limits of its political power. The result was the emergence of people power, but will that be enough to halt the HRPP juggernaut?

The most controversial issue, which has led to some fragmentation in the HRPP political machinery, was the adoption of a policy that banned left-hand-drive motor vehicles, and changed the side of the road on which traffic travels from the right to the left. Horse carriages and motor vehicles have been driven on the right-hand side of the road in Sāmoa since 1899, so it was a shock when the country learned in early September 2007 that the Tuilaepa government was drafting a bill to change that. Perhaps it was not so much the policy itself that prompted public opposition, but the manner in which it was introduced: There was no consultation with stakeholders, no proper scientific study to determine the effects of such a change, rejection of expert opinion by the Chamber of Commerce and the Institute of Professional Engineers, Samoa (IPES), and inattentiveness to public opinion. In other words, there was a perceived lack of transparency and accountability in the formulation of the new government policy, leading to charges of recklessness and possible underhanded dealings. Public accusations against the prime minister over the issue were simply laughed off, which made public relations even worse.

The reason the prime minister gave to the *Samoa Observer* for implementing the policy was the need to align with neighboring countries, namely New Zealand and Australia (SO, 18 Sept 2007). Of course, it was only the first shot fired in a propaganda war that pitted the prime minister and his Human Rights Protection Party against some of the most powerful civic forces in the country—a war