voting in Dr Terepai Maoate as leader by a 4–2 vote.

George successfully fought an application for a High Court injunction by the Maoate faction to prevent him from holding a DAP conference. The conference went ahead, with George confirmed as leader. The conference appointed a new executive, leaving the old executive who stayed with the Maoate faction to claim that they still constituted the legitimate Democratic Alliance Party. After several months of tit for tat in the newspapers and the courts, Chief Justice Quilliam found in favor of the Maoate faction on 3 April. Almost immediately, Norman George launched the New Alliance Party, and the Democratic Alliance Party proceeded to hold its “proper” conference.

The opposition remains dogged by fragmentation. The Democratic Alliance Party claims the support of the majority of successful candidates in local council and mayoral elections in May 1998. However, the government hopes that its devolution program, which gives local authorities considerable autonomy, will sway the outer-island vote during the next general election.

In recent years, all politicians regardless of party affiliation have been called on to prove their worth. The crisis has made voters more critical and demanding and more willing to get involved. Economic reform has led to increased talk of sweeping political reforms. So far, six different models have been proposed by members of the public (including myself). Most advocate a reduction in the number of members of Parliament to fourteen, with one proposing as few as seven. My model called for the northern group islands to be independent from the rest of the Cooks (CIN, 4 July 1998). The government has set aside NZ$100,000 for a commission of inquiry into political reform. Fearing that the commission might take a decade to complete its work, Director of the Rarotonga campus of the University of the South Pacific John Herrmann, the main protagonist of political reform, has called for a referendum on the issue before the next general election.

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FRENCH POLYNESIA
In the year under review, sparring between the territorial president, Gaston Flosse, and the socialist government in Paris continued over such issues as territorial autonomy, regional diplomacy, and relations with Europe. Economic trends were largely positive, which worked to the advantage of the territorial government, yet some policies, such as those on tax and waste disposal, were not well received by the
The government retained most, but not all, of its seats in the electorates that were recontested because of irregularities in the 1996 poll. A number of important reports were published on the legacy of nuclear testing. While present and future radiation risks to the territory appear to be minimal, the issues of past exposure of Islanders to the atmospheric tests and their right to compensation remain unresolved. This review concludes with a tribute to the scholar Bengt Danielsson, who died during the year.

New French Secretary of State for Overseas Territories Jean-Jack Queyranne paid a visit to Tahiti in August 1997. During the visit, President Flosse held forth on the merits of an expansion in the territorial government’s political autonomy, and played on an old theme, “We are waiting for the State . . . to help us pursue the development of our autonomy because it is the sole bulwark against independence” (TP, Sept 1997, 9). Queyranne responded negatively to these suggestions, emphasizing instead that the state would exercise tight control over the expenditure of national funds, and adding that oversight had been lacking in recent years. A new convention signed on 14 July 1997 established clearly defined processes and a committee to oversee the expenditure of state funds. Flosse has expressed concern that this new enthusiasm for state control might act as a brake on development or provide a pretext for undue interference in territorial affairs.

Relations between Paris and the Tahitian president cooled considerably due to differences over the composition of the French delegation to the dialogue session following the annual South Pacific Forum held in Rarotonga in September. Gaston Flosse has had considerable latitude to pursue regional diplomacy on behalf of both the territory and the French republic, first when Jacques Chirac was prime minister in the late 1980s, and later when Chirac’s presidency coincided with the rule of a conservative government in Paris from 1995 to 1997. Since its victory in the 1997 national elections the new left-wing coalition has made it clear that Flosse’s diplomatic initiatives in the name of France are no longer considered appropriate or welcome. Flosse was not invited to join the French delegation to Rarotonga in 1997 but, undeterred, made his own arrangements.

If Flosse could not represent France in Rarotonga, then he would represent French Polynesia. This he did in the capacity of observer at the meeting of Small Island States held before the forum proper. In a pointed nationalist gesture, he bestowed a gift of $30,000 to the Small Islands fund in the name of Tahiti Nui (not France), the Tahitian flag alone flew at the opening ceremony, and Flosse made his speech in Tahitian. In a further attempt to impress, Flosse made six luxury cars available to transport regional heads of government around the tiny capital of the Cook Islands. Flosse could not participate in the forum’s deliberations. Nevertheless, he and pro-independence leader Oscar Temaru were both invited by host Sir Geoffrey Henry to attend the opening ceremony.

French Minister for Cooperation Charles Josselin, who led the French
delegation, noted that Gaston Flosse could represent the territory in restricted areas such as regional fisheries, and transport and communications, but that he had no authority to represent France at the forum. His sentiments were in accordance with 1996 amendments to the territory’s statute of autonomy, which stipulate that the territory can engage in regional negotiations on broader issues, but only with the agreement of the French state. Evidently this line of logic was not well received in the Tahitian corridors of power, so when Josselin passed through Pape’ete on his way back to France not a single member of the territorial government was present to greet him (TP, Oct 1997, 7–10).

Concerns about the territory’s vulnerability to unchecked immigration by metropolitan French and other Europeans continued to be expressed in no uncertain terms. The territory had requested that France seek an appropriate modification of the Treaty of Rome and, failing that, is considering the option of having French Polynesia removed from the list of Europe's overseas territories altogether, although this would mean losing some economic benefits. The treaty’s dispositions relating to associated territories will be reviewed and finalized in the year 2000 (TP, Aug 1997, 36).

In response to questions from territorial Senator Daniel Millaud, Secretary of State for Overseas Territories Jack Queyranne explained that France had been condemned by the European Court of Justice in 1990 for failing to ensure that the principle allowing Europeans to freely reside or work anywhere in the European Union was applied in French Polynesia. In 1995, EU authorities issued a further warning to France that its territories must comply. Queyranne felt it was presumptuous of Gaston Flosse to ask that this principle be “frozen” in relation to Tahiti while the territory sought to continue receiving European development assistance funds. Queyranne concluded that until such a time as the Treaty of Rome was revised, European laws would continue to apply in Tahiti. Moreover, he felt that the threat of a European “invasion” of the territory did not appear very great (TP, Jan 1998, 16).

The “immigration” debate took another twist after an in-depth report on the subject was published by the Economic, Social and Cultural Committee (CESC) in February. The most controversial recommendation, made unanimously by the forty participants in the committee’s inquiry, was that not only should immigration from Europe be strictly controlled, but the same controls should be applied to the influx of metropolitan French. According to the 1996 census, citizens from metropolitan France or from other French overseas possessions accounted for 26,619 people or 12 percent of the population in French Polynesia. During the past decade the number of metropolitan French residing in the territory has not increased greatly, but their composition has changed in important ways.

In the past a large proportion of metropolitan French residents were with the military and made a substantial contribution to the local economy
as consumers. Now, the military component has been replaced by people competing for work with locals. The situation has been exacerbated by the current government’s adoption of a statute for the territorial public service that fails to include an affirmative action clause in favor of employing Tahitians. As a consequence, more and more metropolitan French are taking over the plum positions in the public service. Even less-qualified French people are making inroads into local employment in the tourism industry, largely as personnel in hotels and restaurants.

The Economic, Social and Cultural Committee was very concerned that the practice of allowing uncontrolled access to work and residence by metropolitan French, and to a lesser extent other Europeans, was undermining the culture and social fabric of the territory. The authors of the report contrasted the territory’s population of 220,000 with that of the European Union’s 350 million and argued that “Polynesia is... a micro-society based on a very fragile equilibrium that must be protected against movements which... could have devastating effects in the territory” (TP, March 1998, 15–20). The committee proposed that the constitution of the French republic be amended to grant the territory control over immigration from both France and the European Union; that bona fide residents of the territory be given priority access to employment; that immigration be largely restricted to investors and retirees who will make a contribution to the economy; and that the territory acquire judicial means to ensure that land remains in the hands of the territory’s permanent residents.

Although the committee’s report doubtless reflected a legitimate and widespread public concern, it provoked heated responses from official quarters. Gaston Flosse supports the idea of restricting European immigration, but he believes that metropolitan French have every right to make themselves at home in Tahiti, just as French Polynesians have the right (in theory) to reside and work in mainland France. New French high commissioner to the territory, Jean Aribaud, condemned the report, pronouncing himself “shocked” by its mercenary and discriminatory tone. Jean-Jack Queyranne dismissed its principal recommendation as “nonsense” on the grounds that French Polynesia is part of the republic and therefore metropolitan French cannot be categorized as immigrants (TP, March 1998, 15–20).

Queyranne’s hard line on this issue is evidently not being applied uniformly to the French overseas territories, as two months later he authorized New Caledonia to control French and European immigration in order to protect local employment.

Relations with metropolitan France may not have been harmonious, but the flow of funds from Paris nevertheless continued. Indeed, an injection of extraordinary funds facilitated an economic revival in Tahiti. Financial transfers from the state to the territory totaled 150 billion Pacific francs (F8.25 billion) in 1996. The increase of 40 billion Pacific francs compared to the previous year could partly be attributed to the extraordinary grant (18 billion Pacific francs) made by
President Chirac to compensate for the closure of the nuclear test center and partly to projects subsidized under the French Pons legislation (15 billion Pacific francs), which was designed to assist development in the overseas territories (TP, Sept 1997, 7).

For the most part the territory’s leaders and inhabitants appear oblivious to the various forms of economic turmoil buffeting the rest of the world, and the government’s response to the east Asian economic crisis was no different in this respect. Their muted reaction stems from the assumption that the primary source of income, that is, financial transfers from Paris, will continue regardless of external developments. Nevertheless, the collapse of financial markets, currency devaluations, and the general economic downturn in Asia does have serious repercussions for the limited export oriented sectors of Tahiti’s economy. In recent years the tourist industry has relied increasingly on visitors from Australia, New Zealand, and east Asia, especially Korea and Japan. Dependence on markets in South Korea, Malaysia, and Hong Kong is also evident in the black pearl industry. Finally, the new Air Tahiti Nui company had identified the Seoul–Tokyo route as a key element in its first foray into the international flight scene.

Notwithstanding fears over the ramifications of the Asian crisis and a decrease in the volume of its exports, the territory’s black pearl industry managed to hold its own. Improvements in the quality of the product, its rising popularity, and a slight increase in price per gram produced a 3 percent increase in the value of black pearl exports (up to 14.462 billion Pacific francs) in 1997. The slump in demand from Asia (especially Japan) had also in part been counterbalanced by growing interest from buyers in North America and Europe.

The number of tourists visiting the territory reached a historic peak of 172,129 in 1995. This figure dropped to 163,774 in 1996 as a result of negative publicity worldwide associated with the nuclear test series concluded in January that year, and the destructive riots of September 1995, when Tahiti’s international airport was torched by mobs. Despite the recent downturn in the tourism industry’s fortunes, the government is pressing ahead with plans to increase the number of hotel rooms from three thousand to six thousand by the year 2003 with the help of metropolitan subsidies for investments in infrastructure (TP, Jan 1998, 25).

The territory is proceeding with plans for a national airline to service international routes. However, there have been revisions to the timing of its inaugural flight and other aspects of its operations. Air Tahiti Nui’s first flight on the Los Angeles–Pape’ete–Japan route has been postponed to November 1998. Moreover, the airline will no longer be purchasing a new plane to launch its operations, as the state has declined to subsidize such a purchase. Rather it will hire a secondhand Airbus A340 from Air France. Its main routes are to be between Pape’ete and Pacific rim destinations including the United States, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia.

Controversy continued to plague attempts by the territory to resolve the
long-standing dilemma over how to dispose of the capital’s rubbish. Recently the government purchased land at Taravao for a new waste dump. However, trucks will have to make a 140 kilometer round-trip from Pape’ete, and the dump threatens the integrity of a nearby bay classified as a nature reserve. In February more than a thousand people demonstrated at Taravao against the proposed waste dump.

After the third version of a territorial value added tax (VAT) was finally approved by the national senate in October, the tax entered into force on 1 January 1998. Despite a 20 million Pacific francs advertising campaign by the territorial government to promote its merits, the new tax received a decidedly mixed reception from the public. The government asserted that it would replace existing taxes, would not lead to an across-the-board increase in prices, nor undermine the purchasing power of poorer families. These claims were all met with considerable skepticism. The Evangelical Church wrote a public letter to the president denouncing the value added tax because the risk was great that disadvantaged people would be marginalized even more.

In February, the principal pro-independence party, Tavini, spearheaded a public demonstration in Pape’ete that attracted at least twenty-five hundred protesters against several key policies of the Tahoeraa government. The targets for dissent included the recently introduced value added tax, the proposed waste dump at Taravao, and the legalization of casinos. The participants also gathered to express a general sense of dissatisfaction with increasing levels of social inequality.

In an anticipated decision, on 18 February the French Council of State annulled the outcome of territorial elections held in the Leeward Islands and the Marquesas in May 1996 because of the use by political candidates of public goods and services to influence voters (see Strokirch 1998). In particular, the council drew attention to the dubious behavior of the government and others in granting public housing to twenty-five families in Huahine just prior to the territorial election. As a result, eleven territorial councillors were obliged to recontest their seats in by-elections held on 24 May. The conservative government majority dominated by Tahoeraa won 8 seats (6 in the Leewards and 2 in the Marquesas), the pro-independence party Tavini won 2 seats in the Leewards, and 1 seat went to the independent Lucien Kimitee in the Marquesas.

If court appeals fail, there may soon be another territorial by-election to contest. Alexandre Léontieff, formerly territorial president and national deputy and currently a territorial councillor, was convicted in two corruption cases he has been fighting for several years. One case concerns the Cardella Clinic in Pape’ete, which was ordered to pay a massive overdue tax bill in 1989. Léontieff, in his capacity as minister of finance, agreed to waive 50 percent of this tax. In return the clinic paid a “commission” of 20 million Pacific francs, but the money disappeared without a trace (TP, Nov 1997, 9). For this case Léontieff was sen-
tenced to a three-year prison term of which he must serve eighteen months. Léontieff and another prominent territorial politician, Jean Juventin, were also convicted for taking bribes of $250,000 each from a Japanese developer in return for approving construction of the Opunohu hotel and golf course complex in Moorea. The Opunohu project was never built following its outright rejection in a local referendum. In this instance Léontieff received a three-year prison sentence, of which two years must be served, while Juventin was required to serve only eighteen months of his sentence. Both men are appealing the verdicts (TP, June 1998).

Recent reports on the human and environmental impact of the French nuclear-testing program in the Pacific have provided a mixed picture of its legacy. Moruroa and Us surveys the impact the test program had on the lives and health of Maohi people and is based on one thousand interviews (de Vries and Seur 1997). A number of issues for concern emerged. One was that 10 percent of the Maohi test-site workers were under the age of eighteen, which rendered them very susceptible to the effects of radiation exposure. Many Maohi also worked at the test sites over a period of twenty years, which was hazardous given the increased risks of radiation exposure over time.

Maohi workers were usually responsible for the more dangerous tasks, such as drilling for samples from bomb shafts immediately after a test, and cleaning up contaminated areas. Yet, those who signed up to work at the test sites were generally unaware of the risks involved, including the long-term consequences of exposure to radiation. Although the workers were constantly reassured by French officials that safety regulations prevented radiation exposure, at the same time they were warned not to eat the fish and coconuts, or drink the water, and advised that clothes they wore in contaminated areas had to be destroyed. Despite these warnings, many workers admitted that they still ate local fish and became ill as a result (de Vries and Seur 1997).

In terms of medical procedures, the study provided more cause for alarm. Only half of the workers received medical check-ups at the end of their contracts on site. The French authorities had no long-term research program to monitor the health of site workers after they finished with the test program. Medical records of site workers were kept secret until the tests ended in 1996, when they were made available to former site workers or their families on request.

Another report, resulting from a French Senate inquiry, called for greater transparency on the part of the military over their management of high-level nuclear waste. In particular, the authors considered that the French test sites should be subjected to the same degree of monitoring and regulation as civilian nuclear facilities in France. Although there was no immediate risk of radioactivity leaking from the sites, the report called for the precautionary principle to be applied. The sites should therefore be monitored indefinitely and closed in perpetuity to any form of human habitation.

The report also echoed the call by non-
government organizations for a complete epidemiological study into the impact of nuclear testing on the health of former site workers and people living in the vicinity of the test sites. In conclusion, it noted, “The closure and dismantling of the Pacific Test Center does not exonerate France from its responsibilities. Whatever the evolution of our relations with the territory of French Polynesia, we will remain accountable for the eventual consequences of the tests” (Bataille 1997).

In contrast to the French Senate inquiry’s cautious recommendations, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) gave the French test sites a relatively clean bill of health. An International Advisory Committee was established by the agency to assess the present and expected future radiological conditions at the two nuclear test sites in French Polynesia (see Strokirch 1998). The team of international scientists undertook in-depth studies of soil, plant, animal, and water samples taken from the sites after the final test was held in January 1996. They also drew on scientific data provided by French authorities.

The International Advisory Committee’s report acknowledged that limited amounts of radioactive materials, including tritium, plutonium, and caesium 137, remained in the “accessible” environment of the atolls. They also found that migration of radionuclides from underground test cavities into the lagoon and ocean would continue. Nevertheless, the resultant levels of radioactivity were considered by them to be negligible and therefore would not pose a threat to human health now or in the future. They concluded that no remedial action was justified on radiological protection grounds, nor was there any need for further monitoring at the atolls, although a monitoring program could reassure the public (IAEA 1998a, 1998b).

The International Advisory Committee’s findings essentially vindicated France’s repeated assertions that the long-term radiological effects of the test program would be relatively innocuous. Yet the report does not attempt to make a comprehensive assessment of past radiation levels or the degree to which people were exposed to radiation caused by nuclear tests. In this respect, new information has come to light. Declassified archival material from the French nuclear authority DIRCEN revealed that French nuclear tests in 1966 had exposed inhabitants of Reao, Tureia, Pukarua, and Mangareva to significant doses of radiation comparable to levels around Chernobyl after the reactor meltdown. The military’s own radiological security service had recommended that the Islander populations at risk be evacuated on the eve of the tests, but this was not done, nor were decontamination measures undertaken (Jauvert 1998).

Since the material on the extent of test fallout was publicized, DIRCEN has closed further access to the archives. The French defense minister has admitted that, due to unpredictable weather patterns, the Gambier Islands and Tahiti were subject to nuclear fallout from the early tests. Yet he denied that such fallout was of a level that would adversely affect the inhabitants. Under pressure from Tahitian Senator Daniel

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Millaud to open the archives spanning the period of atmospheric tests from 1966 to 1976, the minister replied that such access could not be permitted before the year 2026 (TP, May 1998, 23–25).

Continuing secrecy on the part of the French military would have come as no surprise to seasoned antinuclear campaigner Bengt Danielsson, had he lived to see it. Bengt died in Sweden, on 9 July 1997, at the age of seventy-six. In his fifty-year love affair with Tahiti, he made a lasting contribution to the territory as a promoter of indigenous culture, an environmental activist, and a writer of both scholarly and popular works in the disciplines of ethnology, history, and politics.

Bengt first achieved fame when he embarked with Thor Heyerdahl on the Kon Tiki raft expedition, which brought him to Tahiti in 1947. Bengt was awarded his doctorate from Uppsala University in 1955 for a thesis based on research undertaken in Raroia, French Polynesia. In 1965, he set up the Polynesian Center, which later became the Museum of Tahiti and Its Islands. Bengt published prolifically on a wide range of subjects, with more notable works including Memorial Polynesien, a classic text on Tahitian history and culture, Gauguin in the South Seas, and various editions of Moruroa Mon Amour, his polemical work on the history of French nuclear colonialism in the territory (TP, Aug 1997, 33).

Bengt and his wife Marie-Thérèse were passionate opponents of the French nuclear-testing program in the Pacific from its outset in the early 1960s until its closure in 1996. They devoted much of their energies to campaigning against the tests because of the potential dangers posed to the health of the Maohi people and their environment. The Danielssons were also at pains to highlight the profound and negative impact of the French colonial presence on the territory’s society and economy. They were thus fervent advocates of indigenous self-determination in the form of expanded autonomy and, ultimately, independence. As a result they were often persecuted by the French authorities and paid a high personal cost for their political activism. Marie-Thérèse continues to work tirelessly for worthy causes. The Danielssons’ efforts on behalf of the Maohi people will not be forgotten.

KARIN VON STROKIRCH

References


Māori Issues

The second half of 1997 was a time of great sadness for Maoridom as some of its finest leaders died. Sir Hepi Te Heuheu of the central North Island Tuwharetoa people was one of a rapidly dwindling number of traditional paramount chiefs. Although he was a conservative within the Pākehā political spectrum, he commanded great respect within Maoridom, having the mana and ability to draw everyone together. In the last few years of his life he convened several national hui to discuss government polices that were to negatively affect Māori. At these hui Māori self-determination and sovereignty were debated at length, and a large number of proposals about how constitutional change could take place were considered. Despite his conservatism, Sir Hepi carried Maoridom’s uncompromising message to the government and withstood the prime minister’s criticism with calm dignity. His funeral ceremonies in August brought thousands from all parts of Maoridom. Non-Māori government representatives also attended.

At the opposite end of the political spectrum was Tuawai (Eva) Rickard, who died in December. Eva had campaigned fearlessly against the confiscation of lands from Māori and led many public protests against different governments and their anti-Māori policies. Her effectiveness was demonstrated with the return of her own hapū’s lands at Raglan after a ten-year battle. She was a strong supporter of Māori women and younger Māori and spent much time in her later years actively encouraging and mentoring a large number of potential leaders.

Eva was also a forthright critic of those Māori, and particularly Māori men, whom she considered had sold out to the government on various issues. She was highly critical of those who negotiated the national settlement of all Māori fisheries claims with the now infamous Sealords Deal. The negotiators included past Minister of Māori Affairs Matiu Rata, who died tragically in July as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident. He had been responsible for introducing the legislation that set up the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975. Although the tribunal was slow getting started, since 1982 it has been unsurpassed in its ability to ensure that Māori receive at least some measure of justice for their ill-treatment at the hands of successive governments since 1840.

In his later years, Matiu Rata led one of the larger claims to the tribunal, which resulted in the Sealords Deal. Although this brought him into bitter conflict with his own and several other iwi, he never lost hope that the deal would eventually bring benefits to all Māori. Yet the final settlement and distribution of the proceeds of the deal has now been tied up in the courts for more than five years. Māori have little confidence in the courts being able to resolve the multiplicity of issues the deal has spawned, given that the judges are invariably non-Māori.