ent communities, were involved in a process of dialogue and reconciliation. This should include a full and honest debate about the reasons behind the coup attempt. But too many Fijian leaders had yet to embrace this notion, committed instead to racist prescriptions and policies that denied any voice to the country’s other communities and ethnic groups. As it greeted the new year, what Fiji desperately needed was a chance to redeem its future, a future that continued to be held hostage—like the People’s Coalition Government had been—by the greed and folly of an influential few.

SANDRA TARTE

References


NEW CALEDONIA

Year two of the Noumea Accord (Chappell 1999) saw continuing movement toward self-government but also ongoing tensions in the fragile consensus that produced the fifteen-to-twenty-year agreement in 1998. In a May issue of l’Express a scathing article entitled, “The Discords of Noumea” (Conan 2000), highlighted contradictory interpretations by the signatories of what the accord meant, a lack of collegiality in the territorial congress, growing disunity among Kanak politicians, disputes over the provincial shares of a partial localization of the Société le Nickel (SLN), and arguments over the role of indigenous Kanak custom in forming a common nationhood among diverse, often polarized, ethnic groups. It was a year filled with discord, but in October the country tried to put on a hopeful face by hosting the eighth Festival of Pacific Arts, a regional honor that its political strife had canceled fifteen years earlier.

Having experienced tragic inter-communal bloodshed in the 1980s, New Caledonian leaders voiced no support for the actions of extremists in neighboring Fiji in May 2000. Rock Wamytan, president of the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) condemned the Fijian coup attempt by George Speight: “The nationalist claims of Melanesians must be taken into account, but in a democratic framework.” Wamytan blamed Britain for the ethnic crisis in Fiji, but he also recommended that Indo-Fijians take steps to share economic power with native Fijians (NC, 25 May 2000). Likewise, Leopold Jorédié, Kanak vice-president of the New Caledonian executive council, said his government “will not support a coup. To us, it is obvious that any government must come out of the will of the people” (PIR 25 May 2000). Aloisio Sako, president of the Wallisian Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RDO), called the Fijian coup a dangerous case of misdirected ethnic antagonism that trampled on fundamental human rights (Sako 2000).

The issue of “collegiality” in the congress had come up soon after the 1999 elections, when millionaire Jacques Lafleur’s loyalist Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR) gained a narrow
majority (28 to 26) by allying with Kanak dissidents of the Fédération des Comités de Coordination Indépendantistes (FCCI). This coalition enabled conservative Jean Lèques to become president of the new executive and Jorédié of the FCCI, vice-president—when both Paris and Wamytan had expected someone from the FLNKS to hold the latter position. In the cabinet, the RPCR-FCCI outnumbered the FLNKS 7 to 4, vindicating the concerns of critics like Gerard Jodor, of the pro-independence labor federation Union Syndicaliste des Travailleurs Kanak et Exploités (USTKE), who had predicted that the self-government measures delegated to the territory over the next generation by the Noumea Accord would simply replace French colonial rule with domination by Lafleur’s local business “mafia” (Chappell 1999).

At the end of April, just before the second anniversary of the Noumea Accord, the four FLNKS cabinet ministers denounced the drift of the RPCR away from the consensual spirit of the accord. Wamytan accused the RPCR’s dominating attitude of causing dysfunction in the country’s institutions. The FLNKS had taken its complaints about lack of information-sharing to administrative court five times, because “the State must play its role of arbiter” (NC, 29 Apr 2000). French Secretary of State for Overseas Administrations Jean-Jack Queyranne visited the territory in early May to plead for more consultation between the RPCR and the FLNKS, to honor the spirit of dialogue embedded in the 1998 accord. Although the first portfolios, such as primary education, had begun to be transferred from Paris to the Territorial Congress in January, “The French state has not withdrawn from New Caledonia,” he said, “it is a full partner, a participant, and at the same time it must accompany New Caledonia in its evolution.” Despite growing disarray within the FLNKS, Queyranne defended its status as one of three signatories to the Matignon (1988) and Noumea Accords, along with France and the RPCR. Wamytan threatened to walk out of the congress, but Lèques defended majority rule, and Lafleur said that if the FLNKS left, nobody would notice (NC, 2, 3 May 2000; PIR 2, 3 May 2000; Conan 2000).

The RPCR had its loyalist critics, such as Didier Leroux’s Alliance and the right-wing Front National, but the four-party FLNKS has suffered more from internal splintering. As early as 1995, its second largest coalition member, the Parti de Libération Kanak (Palika) ran on a separate electoral ticket (Chappell 1999). In 1998, key dissidents such as François Burck, Raphael Mapou, and Jorédié broke away from the FLNKS to form the FCCI, while the Parti Socialiste Kanak, a small party composed of talkative French leftists, became defunct, to be replaced by Sako’s RDO. At the March 2000 annual congress of the FLNKS, more internal differences emerged. Victor Tutugoro, president of the Union Progressiste Mélanésienne (UPM), told the press, “We don’t have a clear orientation, and no working methods.” The FLNKS normally left to local committees the task of political mobilization, and members of the Union Calédonienne (UC), the largest and oldest Kanak party, questioned whether the FLNKS, while symbolizing a national liberation struggle, could also function as an electoral tool. In
early April, seven elected members of the UC vowed to act as an autonomous group in the congress, leaving only three UC delegates within the FLNKS, including Wamytan. Bernard Lepeu, recently displaced from the UC presidency by Wamytan, joined the new UC group, along with Nicole Waia, a Kanak news analyst at Radio Djидо. Wamytan called the secession by delegates elected on the UC-FLNKS list illegal and demanded a party disciplinary council (NC, 6, 22, 26 April 2000; PIR 20 Mar 2000).

Meanwhile, the results of the May 1999 election in the Islands Province were revoked by the French Council of State for irregularities in counting absentee ballots, a key factor since half of all Loyalty Islanders live and work in the industrial Southern Province. The new election in June 2000 revealed more factionalism within Kanak ranks. The UC-FLNKS, led by Richard Kaloi, ran separately from Palika, led by Charles Washetine, but collectively they hoped to retain their narrow majority in the provincial council with active support from USTKE, a former FLNKS member in the 1980s. Their opponents united under the banner of “A New Challenge for the Islands” and included four groups that critics called an “alliance against nature”: former Kanak radical Nidoish Naisseline’s Libération Kanak Socialiste (LKS), an odd reincarnation of just-deceased Kanak hardliner Yann Céléné Uregei’s Front Uni de Libération Kanak (FULK), and the RPCR-FCCI, led by Simon Louckhote, loyalist chair of the Territorial Congress.

Naisseline, a high chief of Mare, accused the FLNKS of trying to colonize his province with a bloated bureaucracy and of neglecting Kanak custom—an issue that twenty years ago caused him to split off from Palika, which still espouses an eclectic brand of “scientific socialism.” Kanak nationalist critics called him a “sniper” who wanted power only for himself, but former Kanak militant Cono Hamu, now head of the FCCI in the Islands Province, said the coalition wanted to open up the province to outside investment to create more jobs. Washetine, an emerging star of Palika, emphasized education, his specialty, and wanted to redirect the Islands Province economy toward the new mining projects in the Kanak-dominated Northern Province. The pro-independence parties won the election, 8 seats to 6, as in 1999, with the UC-FLNKS holding 6 seats to Palika’s 2 (NC, 7, 26 June 2000; NH, 15, 22 June 2000). Palika celebrated its gains in the province, however, since it had been primarily a party of Grande Terre, the main island, since Naisseline split off in 1981 (Kanak, Aug 2000).

Pro-independence leaders dismissed the FCCI defectors who collaborated with Lafleur in the congress, including two former presidents of the UC, for needing Lafleur’s patronage because of financial crises. In fact, Jорédіëw was indicted in late 1999 for financial corruption during his term as president of the Northern Province in the mid-1990s, when he still belonged to the UC. He had allegedly diverted (or allowed to be diverted) provincial funds to members of his family and hometown for business enterprises. In January, Jорédіëw received a one-year suspended sentence for illegally “ingesting” funds, and his wife and two daughters received one to three months of the same, while an aide and
his wife got prison terms of four and two years, respectively (NC, 13 Dec 1999, 5 Jan 2000). Jorédié described himself as a “nationalist, but realistic,” since France still directly finances the development of the country. “I’m not selling dreams,” he said. “To talk about independence these days is an exercise of demagoguery” (NC, 20 Apr 2000). Mapou, once a Palika hardliner, also had serious financial difficulties before he joined the FCCI (Pabouy 2000; Wapotro 2000), though publicly he opposed the tendency for the three provincial governments to pursue their own development policies rather than coordinating a broader plan (NC, 21 Dec 2000).

Maurice Lenormand, former president of the UC in the 1950s, said that economic progress must take precedence over political sovereignty: “Independence is only a word.” But he observed that the younger generation, both Kanak and Caledonian, is seeking its own national identity in a regional context (NC, 6 Dec 2000).

Billy Wapotro of the Protestant Educational Alliance predicted that increasing numbers of university-educated Kanak militants would change local politics, because they had precise plans for development projects, not vague ideologies. Washetine compared the rise of Palika in the North and Islands to the generational change-of-guard that occurred in the 1970s, when Palika emerged out of the radical student movements. He claimed that many, like himself, were attracted to Palika because of its long-term vision of socioeconomic change and grassroots organizational approach (Wapotro 2000; Washetine 2000). In November, Wamytan was reelected president of both the UC and the FLNKS. The FLNKS decided to recognize the separate existence of the dissident UC group within its framework, at the same time expanding the membership and coordinating the powers of its Political Bureau to curb further splintering. The coalition reaffirmed its commitment to ultimate independence and improved relations with regional organizations (NC, 27 Nov 2000; PIR 30 Nov 2000). The UC declared its status as “founding father and nourishing mother” of the FLNKS, and Palika considered joining its allies on a single list for the municipal elections of 2001 (NC, 23 Nov, 18 Dec 2000).

In the French political system, municipal elections come directly under the control of Paris, as do local courts and police. Ironically, considering the promise made in the Noumea Accord to restrict the territorial electorate to long-term residents and establish a New Caledonian nationality, three thousand citizens of the European Union resident in the territory will be eligible to vote in the 2001 municipal elections (NC, 19 Dec 2000). Furthermore, in June the French Parliament voted 339 to 2 that its new rule requiring men and women to be represented in equal numbers on party electoral lists must be extended to France’s three Pacific territories, starting with the 2001 municipal elections. An amendment proposed by Loueckhote to exempt New Caledonia from the parity rule until 2003, on the grounds that the Kanak-dominated Northern and Island Provinces are not yet ready for such a measure, was hotly opposed by the Association of New Caledonia’s Women Citizens, who petitioned both the congress and the French Parliament and marched in

Sako said the RDO was organizing Wallisian and Futunan women for the upcoming electoral challenge. An issue of concern for migrants from Wallis and Futuna was the “particular accord” provided for in the Noumea Accord between that French Pacific territory and New Caledonia. More than half of all Wallisians and Futunans now live in the mineral-rich territory, and their homeland depends heavily on family remittances because it lacks other resources for income. The creation of a local citizenship in New Caledonia to restrict the electorate and working rights to long-term residents might call into question the presence of 6,000 Wallisians and Futunans in the territory who are recent migrants. In February and April, traditional leaders from the poorer territory met with officials and customary leaders in New Caledonia to discuss ways to maintain an open relationship while regulating immigration. Tino Manuohalalo of the RDO holds a cabinet post in the New Caledonian government responsible for health and social affairs, because several thousand poor Wallisians live as squatters around Noumea. Sako pointed out that in the past ten years, 2,000 Europeans have immigrated to the territory, compared to only about 1,500 Wallisians, so the “threat” from Wallisians to New Caledonian self-determination was exaggerated. The UC was more welcoming than Palika to Wallisians, he said, but either way new migrants will no longer have free access to local jobs as French citizens. France would have to provide more economic development aid to Wallis and Futuna to keep the migrants home, but talks progressed slowly because of the poorer territory’s dependency and continued to the end of the year (PIR 3 Feb, 7 Apr 2000; NC, 14 Oct 2000; Sako 2000; Moleana 2000).

Nickel mining remained contentious, beginning with strikes and blockades by the Syndicat des Ouvriers et Employé de Nouvelle-Caledonie (SOENC) against the SLN in February and March. The union protested restructuring plans by the SLN to increase output and lower production costs, which would mean job losses. SOENC slowed down smelting at the Doniambo plant in Noumea, blocked the loading of ore tankers, and put up roadblocks for seven weeks, and then, after signing a government-negotiated agreement, resumed its strike actions. The SLN lost about US$20 million, and even other labor unions protested the “waste” caused by SOENC disputes (PIR 22 Feb, 13, 20 Mar 2000). Meanwhile, plans for other nickel-processing plants proceeded. The Northern Province, in partnership with the Canadian group Falconbridge, said that current studies of the Koniambo site should enable a decision to be made by the end of 2002 about the feasibility of the much-touted “northern factory,” which Kanak leaders hope will create 800 jobs and produce 54,000 tons a year (PIR 20 Jan 2000). Another Canadian firm, Inco, said that its pilot project for a second “southern factory” besides Doniambo has been so successful that it plans to invest about US$100 million in constructing the plant in 2001, hoping
to employ 1,000 people and produce 55,000 tons a year (NC, 15 Dec 2000). SLN-owned Doniambo normally employs 1,400 people and produces 57,000 tons a year (PIR 26 July 2000), and another consortium is exploring the possibility of building a fourth processing plant at Prony (NC, 21 Nov 2000).

New Caledonia has one third of the world’s total nickel reserves and ranks third in world output. Nickel provides 90 percent of the territory’s exports and employs 10 percent of the population. Profits have increased because the Asian stainless-steel market has caused a rise in the world price for nickel (PIR 20 Jan, 27 Apr 2000). The most contested issue of 2000 was the debate over provincial shares of the partial “localization” of 30 percent of the SLN and 8 percent of its parent, Eramet. The previous year, France had voted a credit of US$1 billion to the new Société Territoriale Calédonienne de Participation Industrielle (STCPI) to enable New Caledonia to buy French state-owned shares of the SLN and invest the dividends in local development projects. The Kanak-ruled Northern Province was due to receive 50.5 percent of the devolved shares, and the RPCR-ruled Southern Province 49.5 percent, in order to promote the regional “rebalancing” called for in the Matignon and Noumea Accords. The FLNKS had been delighted, seeing the agreement as a needed boost to development in the relatively backward Kanak provinces, but in February 2000, Pierre Frogier of the RPCR withdrew his signature from the document, suddenly opposing the majority control of the STCPI by the North. Lafleur had disliked the mining shares deal from the start, especially the possibility that the North could convert its Eramet shares into SLN shares and gain majority control of the SLN itself, thus making the SLN “hostage” to politics (Conan 2000).

This objection was ironic, considering that Lafleur himself had once sold the North the mining firm, the Société Minière du Sud-Pacifique (SMS), that was developing the northern factory! Despite efforts by French High Commissioner Thierry Lataste and special envoy Alain Christnacht, the FLNKS and the RPCR could not come to terms by May, and France made threats to call off the whole deal (PIR 6 Apr, 14 May 2000). Finally, in July, Queyranne, Lataste, and French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (who signed the Noumea Accord) announced the signing of a new agreement that would divide the shares 50-50 between the North and the South, with the Islands Province participating in the North’s allocation. But the North and Islands will receive 75 percent of future profits and hold the chair of the STCPI (PIR 26 July, 23 Aug 2000). Tragically, SMS Chair Raphael Pidjot, one of the educated bright lights of the independence movement, died in a helicopter crash in November at the age of forty, along with five SMS technical and financial managers. Wamytan said, “Enough is enough. Enough of these suspicious deaths” (NC, 29 Nov 2000; PIR 4, 21 Dec 2000). Yet Mapou of the FCCI warned of the environmental costs of additional nickel mining, noting that a billion tons had so far been extracted, stripping away forests and polluting precious waterways (NC, 11 Dec
2000), a sentiment shared by the territory’s small Green Party (Boengkhih 2000).

The issue of working rights in New Caledonia, embodied in the Noumea Accord, produced a much-heralded “social pact” among the government, employers, and labor unions. In March, President Jean Lèques urged the creation of a “code of good conduct” to prevent the disruptive labor conflicts that characterized the territory. By August, five months of tense negotiations had generated a twenty-page draft, and on 20 October the “social partners” (employers and unions) and state officials signed the final document. The resulting agreement proclaimed a new vision of social relations, in which employers and workers would respect each other’s viewpoints and rights in order to construct, in peace, a more developed, productive, and equitable economy. The pact recognized employers’ managerial power while acknowledging workers’ right to organize and to elect representatives to negotiate on their behalf. The minimum wage would gradually be increased to 100,000 CFP (about US$1,000) per month by 2003, while comprehensive health care, pensions, lodging, and familial allowances would be made more widely available, job-creation would receive new emphasis, and long-term residents would be favored in local hiring. To avert costly strikes, the pact included measures such as mandatory negotiating and mediation periods and government-supported agents and commissions to promote dialogue, as well as restrictions on the right to strike in essential air and maritime transport industries and a required minimum of social services. The pact was said to safeguard both social democracy and public order and was endorsed by loyalist and independence parties, the major employer associations, and eleven of fifteen labor unions (NC, 4 Mar, 21 Nov 2000; PIR 20 Aug, 22 Nov 2000; Banian, Oct 2000; Kanak, Nov 2000).

Unfortunately, the mining branch of SOENC called a wildcat strike on 16 November, putting up roadblocks and destroying buildings. While 180 police confronted the strikers, Lafleur authorized Jorédié to grant SOENC’s primary demand: raising the minimum wage to 100,000 CFP by July 2001, two years earlier than the social pact had called for. Lèques, the employers, and other labor unions immediately decried this concession to force, arguing that the hard-won social pact was almost moot under such conditions. The pro-independence parties boycotted the next meeting of the Territorial Congress and accused the RPCR and the FCCI of betraying the pact and demonstrating yet again their lack of collegial consultation. Didier Guenant-Jeanson, secretary-general of the largest labor federation, said that voters who approved the Noumea Accord did not want “a banana republic,” and in early December he led two thousand marchers in support of democracy, not dictatorship. Sylvain Nea of SOENC responded by organizing more barricades on roads and mine sites on 20 December (NC, 18–28 Nov, 13, 21 Dec 2000).

Pierre Frogier of the RPCR, one of New Caledonia’s parliamentary representatives in Paris, accused the UC of opposing the minimum-wage increase in order to keep rural Kanak clans
out of the cash economy and without access to education, and thus allow its party elite a free hand without accountability (NH, 23–29 Nov 2000).

Pro-independence ustke had refused even to sign the social pact, calling it “deceitful.” Its new president, Gérard Jodar (who replaced Louis Kotra Uregei), withdrew his federation from the Intersyndicat of the four largest unions, strengthened its ties to metropolitan leftist labor movements, and declared ustke’s intention to form a new political party, if necessary, to protect the interests of workers. He cited the police action against his union when it was striking in front of the Numbo cement factory in April-May as evidence of government efforts to restrict the rights of workers. That clash had resulted in several injuries and protest marches (NC, 24 May, 5 Dec 2000; PIR 22 Oct 2000). Nevertheless, congress voted the accelerated raise in the minimum wage as a “law of the country” in late December, with the support of all parties but Waia’s uc group, who said it discredited the social pact (NC, 29 Dec 2000).

Enacting new “laws of the country” is one of the powers devolved from Paris to the territory by the Noumea Accord. The proposed fifteen-to-twenty-year transitional period has already yielded changes in local tax laws to compensate for the withdrawal of some metropolitan funding, since a self-governing country-to-be needs to find ways to finance itself, at least partly. French monetary transfers still constitute the largest source of income for the territory, and though administrative funding has dropped, development aid from Paris has increased 16 percent since the Noumea Accord, mainly for health care, education, rural electrification, and road building (NC, 8 Dec 2000). To sustain local government funding, congress introduced a 4 percent tax on services in March, except for essentials such as public transport. In July, eight old taxes were scrapped and replaced with an 11 percent duty on all imported luxury goods, and another 11 percent tax on “cultural and sports” products, such as bicycles and musical instruments. In November, soenc and two other labor unions protested with sit-ins against the tax-driven rise in fuel prices, asking for an immediate increase in the minimum wage (PIR 3 Mar, 31 July, 17 Nov 2000). But congress still enacted a tax on air freight of 8 percent to finance the expansion of Air Caledonia International (Aircalin), and taxed imported agricultural products to subsidize local farmers (NC, 5 Dec 2000).

The expansion of Aircalin, which is 84 percent owned by the territorial government, was a major issue in congress for much of the year. The goal was to develop New Caledonia’s air links within the Pacific region by acquiring three Airbuses, mainly to bring in more Japanese tourists from Osaka and Tokyo. Marianne Devaux of the rpcr, vice president of the Southern Province and president of the Agency for Air Service in New Caledonia, saw Aircalin’s growth as crucial to development: “Without financing by Paris, we will remain dependent on Air France” (NC, 29 Dec 2000; PIR 29 Mar, 23 Nov 2000). But Paris stalled on releasing the funds for the Airbuses until the end of the year, and Air France said it was determined to remain in the region, despite
recent losses and labor disputes. Both Leroux’s Alliance and the UC opposed the financial risk of expansion (NC, 22–30 Dec 2000). In late December, congress passed a US$600 million budget for 2001, of which 75 percent was slated for the three provincial governments. The territory would invest in public buildings, roads, and sporting facilities, and give special funding to health, petrol subsidies, and agriculture, but cut spending on tourism, job creation, the arts, and libraries (PIR 28 Dec 2000; NC, 28 Dec 2000). The Southern Province allocated more money to health care, education, housing, employment, and tourism, but complained that it did not get enough budgetary help, considering that it was home to 68 percent of the population (NC, 14 Oct, 14 Dec 2000). The North, its main rival, has created not only the nickel smelting project but also a commercial tuna fishing fleet, and funded tourism and agriculture, despite criticisms by political opponents and labor unions of Paul Neaoutyine’s Palika-dominated regime (NC, 4 May, 19–30 Dec 2000; PIR 11 Dec 2000). Recent exploration for offshore oil and gas has generated lively speculations (NC, 16 June 2000).

The Noumea Accord called for Kanak identity to be the centerpost of the new, albeit multiethnic, nation. Talk of socioeconomic modernization inevitably raises questions about the role of indigenous custom in future development. The FCC1 proposed constructing a single nationality, not “a Kanak nationalism of the ghetto,” by promoting individualism and democracy. Elie Poigoune of Palika organizes students within schools, finds retirees to tutor young Kanak, and urges the creation of a “common elite.” According to Burck, a former UC president, “Those who now claim Kanak identity the most are often those who live completely like Europeans!” Women increasingly rebel against Kanak custom, as do migrants to Noumea for education and jobs, and the Kanak rate of success in French schools is still very low (Conan 2000). The 1998 accord recognized Kanak vernacular languages as appropriate to teach in schools, but instructors need training. Octave Togna of the Kanak Culture Development Agency suggested choosing one widespread local language to counter the use of French exclusively, but the Kanak peoples have twenty-eight languages and immigrant groups another half dozen (PIR 22 Mar 2000). Louis Mapou of the Agency for Rural Development and Land Reform held a June conference on the thorny issue of how to decide which lands belong to which Kanak tribe, given that both precolonial migrations and colonial administrative and reservation policies altered customary ownership claims (NC, 3 June 2000).

The cultural highlight of the year was the eighth Pacific Arts Festival, held in October and early November in Noumea and some upcountry towns. Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s 1975 Melanesia 2000 festival had received financial and technical support from moderates in the French administration but also generated protests from radical Kanak, who called it a “folklorization” of their culture. People who supported that festival saw it as the Kanak reclaiming their “place in the sun,” as Tjibaou put it. Jacques Boengkhi of the Tjibaou Cultural
Center has long promoted respect for traditional Kanak leadership and protocol, including the consultative customary Senate created by the Noumea Accord. He said that France had canceled the planned Pacific Arts Festival in Noumea in the mid-1980s when the country was in turmoil. This time around, local politicians, both loyalist and pro-independence, tried to coopt the ceremonies, but the gathering was again a prime opportunity to represent Kanak identity to the region (Boengkhih 2000). Déwé Gorodey of Palika, a Kanak activist, writer, and educator, and now the cabinet minister for culture, youth, and sports, supported the Arts Festival, but she admitted that exclusively “Kanak independence” is no longer a realistic option (Gorodey 2000). Lafleur published his autobiography in May, in which he criticized French officials who had backed the Kanak against Caledonians (PIR 7 May 2000).

The opening of the festival in late October was delayed by three days, officially because of bad weather but also because of protests by Kanak artists and musicians over cultural property rights and a strike over promotions by USKE that prevented Radio France Overseas (RFO) from broadcasting the festival on television. Independence parties, however, condemned such disruptions: “At a time when the Noumea Accord consecrates the full recognition of Kanak culture, the gathering of other cultural groups of the country around it, and the opening of the country to its geographic surroundings, the FLNKS Political Bureau regards boycotts of this effort as unwelcome.” Christian Paul, the newly appointed French Secretary of State for Overseas Administrations, thus had to face his first crisis when he arrived, but the RFO and USKE finally reached agreement (NC, 5 Oct 2000; PIR 1 Sept, 23–26 Oct 2000).

For the first few days, Festival Village in Noumea, on the site of the old United States military headquarters in World War Two, was the center of activity, but then the cultural performances moved to the Northern and Islands Provinces. Some visitors complained that too many French were running the show, especially in Noumea, and that the official translators did not always properly convey messages intended for the people of “Kanaky,” while others complained about facilities or food logistics. But the mayor of Koné and the president of the Northern Province praised the sharing of Oceanian cultures and voiced the heartfelt pride of the often-isolated Kanak hosts, and many visitors from other Pacific islands seemed to find the experience of indigenous intercultural contacts moving. Neaoutyine explained, “There is a strong will and in the end no need for language because people recognize each other through their customs. We watch and we understand” (PIR 31 Oct, 14 Nov 2000).

DAVID CHAPPELL

References
Banian, periodical of the Union Syndicaliste des Ouvriers et Employés de Nouvelle-Calédonie.


Kanak. Periodical of the Parti de Libération Kanak (Palika).


Solomon Islands

Solomon Islanders have not experienced a worse start to a year in decades. In January 2000, Solomon Sunaone Mamaloni, one of the country’s veteran politicians and its first leader, passed away. Sir Peter Kenilorea’s approbation of his friend and schoolmate as “the father of modern politics in Solomon Islands” could not have been more apt (SS, 18 Jan 2000, 5). In politics, Mamaloni was an all-rounder. He was a real “man of the people.” He would fit most Solomon Islanders’ honor list. When in need, Solomon Islanders, especially ordinary villagers, found him most accessible, even when he was prime minister. And without fail, Solo (as he was endearingly dubbed) would go an extra mile to help another wantok.

Solo had long fiercely defended Solomon Islands’ sovereignty and the right of Solomon Islanders to “do their own thing.” If they learned from their mistakes, they should not fear making them. His experience during British colonialism taught him an important lesson—it was far better for Solomon Islanders to carve their own futures and destiny than be subject to ignominious racism, vacuous high-mindedness, and mindless arrogance, which Solomon Islanders detested. Mamaloni has left a leadership lacuna that will be difficult to fill for a long time, as events that unfolded in subsequent months have attested.

The 1999 census revealed that the population of the country had increased by 43 percent overall, from 285,176 in 1986 to 409,042. The growth rate declined markedly from 3.5 percent per year to 2.8 percent per year. Some 41.5 percent of the population is aged under fifteen years. But the census showed that only 23 percent of the population (57,472) were paying taxes. Conversely, 45 percent (111,905) were involved in unpaid labor (SS, 8 Sept 2000, 3).

The sporadic ethnic fighting that began in late 1998 between the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) continued. However, it was limited mostly to areas around and peripheral to Honiara. In February, the Malaita Eagle Force claimed responsibility for several killings at Pelaha and Lunga areas (SS, 23 Feb 2000, 1). These intermittent insurrections and killings merely escalated animosity between the two groups. In early July, the Malaita Eagle Force mounted opera-