Reviews of American Sāmoa and Niue are not included in this issue but, for the first time, a review of Rapa Nui is included.

Cook Islands

The period under review began with the fortieth anniversary of the achievement of self-government in free association with New Zealand. Scott Robert of New Zealand won the popular Round Rarotonga Road Race for 2005, and a 197-kilogram northern bluefin tuna caught by Willie Farani of the Gypsy Trade was sold to Japan for a record US$62,000 (CIN, 2 July 2005, 1).

But soon the rejoicing turned into a year of political sackings: Sir Geoffrey Henry as deputy prime minister in August 2005, then Tupou Fareka and Tom Marsters as cabinet ministers in September 2005, in what Prime Minister Jim Marurai called “clearing dirt from my government” (CIN, 10 Sept 2005, 1). The outgoing ministers were replaced by Dr Terepai Maoate (as deputy prime minister), Mr Tangata Vavia, and Mrs Ngamau Munokoa. Further possible changes in cabinet and rumors of new coalitions continued to emerge from time to time throughout this period. Local media magnate George Pitt was also sacked in October 2005 from his position as chairman of the board for Rarotonga Island’s electricity provider, Te Aponga Uira O Tumutevaroaro. Several heads of department positions were re-advertised. The Cook Islands’ most senior diplomat, the high commissioner to New Zealand and Australia, former Cook Islands Prime Minister Dr Robert Woonton, was fired for allegedly interfering with local politics in the Northern group, an accusation Dr Woonton denied. Prime Minister Marurai asked Minister Peri Vaevae Pare to resign after he was accused of misusing public funds. Vaevae was later found guilty, subsequently losing his seat in Matavera.

The by-election that emerged between three contestants—Vaine Teokotai for the Democratic Party, Kiriau Turepu for the Cook Islands Party, and Mereana Taikoko as an independent—should be decided by July 2006. However, it is doubtful that the result of the Matavera by-election will stabilize a coalition-based government that has seen many shifts in allegiance by several of the twenty-four member parliamentarians insensitive to the party supporters who voted them in. An earlier vacated parliamentary seat in Atiu Island initiated three hopeful candidates, including former MP Norman George. Standing this time as an independent, George won the by-election, potentially shifting the power base his way—a situation he is familiar with, having been a key player in many previous coalition governmental changes. The possibility of a hung parliament also hangs over the small nation.

Initial efforts by Jim Marurai at creating a government of national unity were viewed as unrealistic by most local longtime political leaders (CIN, 13 August 2005, 1). But the
prime minister later “walked the talk,” as he and members of his department trekked into the Takuvaine valley as part of a team-spirit–building exercise. Local media described the activity as an effort to overcome the negative impact of personnel changes in the department resulting from several past leadership adjustments. Sadly, Prime Minister Marurai’s wife Tuaine passed away after a long illness and was laid to rest in her home island of Mangaia in September 2005.

The first newspaper of the Cook Islands, published 26 January 1895 under the label Te Torea, was remembered (CIN, 17 Aug 2005, 7). Sir Geoffrey Henry, the leader of the oldest political party in the nation, the Cook Islands Party, confirmed that he would step down from national and party politics in 2006 (CIN, 28 Sept 2005, 1), although most observers remained skeptical at the announcement. Meanwhile there is increasing pressure from women leaders for more access to positions of political power. A regional conference was held in Rarotonga, aimed at advancing women’s representation in Parliament. One suggestion was the enactment of legal quotas for special measures for women as parliamentary members. Women leaders and the general public have long perceived that existing parliamentarians did very little legislative work for their salaries and special benefits. Some noted that by January 2006 Parliament had only sat for thirty days since the general election in 2004 (CIN, 31 Jan 2006, 1).

During the year, the so-called “Sheraton debacle” continued to reemerge in a variety of forms, first as part of the ongoing struggle over national overseas debt, and second as an element of a controversial Unit Titles Bill. The Cook Islands government’s debt with the Italian government to build a hotel, which at one time amounted to NZ$150 million, had been reduced to NZ$48.6 million in 1998. The debt was finally settled with the government of Italy at NZ$12.9 million in February 2006. The Cook Islands’ capacity to pay and Italian breaches of banking regulations were bargaining issues that led to the final settlement (CIN, 24 Feb 2006, 1). A second Sheraton connection was the Tim Tepaki–sponsored Unit Titles Bill—labeled by some as selling airspace to foreigners (CIN, 22 July 2005, 1). This bill underlined New Zealand–based property developer Tepaki’s hope for a major project at the Sheraton hotel site in Takitumu, Rarotonga, and another project on Ootu in Aitutaki. Tepaki declared that he had spent over NZ$2 million since 2000 but continued to express interest in the building of five-star hotels in both Takitumu and Ootu.

Public and landowner concerns focused on the Unit Titles Bill’s encroaching on the activities of the lease approval tribunal, the development investment board, immigration, and the national building code (CIN, 19 July 2005, 1). The Are Ariki (National House of Chiefs) and the Koutu Nui (National House of Subchiefs) expressed concern about the final draft of the bill, alleging that it was being rushed and that crucial recommendations over the height of buildings had not been considered (CIN, 19 Sept 2005, 1). However,
Pa Ariki, the paramount chief of Takitumu in Rarotonga (who stood to benefit directly from the bill because of Tepaki’s proposed development on her Vaima’anga property and a promise to help build her palace), questioned Parliament’s delay in passing the bill. The cabinet had earlier supported the bill but it took some time for Parliament to consider it. Aitutaki people were even more vocal; they rallied in opposition to the Unit Titles Bill, presenting a petition to Parliament. Despite widespread opposition, Parliament eventually passed the bill.

Hotel developer Tim Tepaki was also drawn into another development controversy, which emerged in the public media when the cabinet agreed to sell him government assets in Wellington for NZ$4 million without any transfer of cash, but rather a security deposit (CIN, 15 Sept 2005, 1). The government company holding the New Zealand assets, Cook Islands Property Corporation (NZ) Ltd, signed the deal on 12 September 2005. The arrangement became even more contentious when the Cook Islands government audit director declared in his report that there were perceived conflicts of interest and a lack of thorough and intensive due diligence. Tepaki reacted to the comments by labeling the audit director’s report as flawed and slanderous (CIN, 16 Jan 2006, 6). Seemingly taking a 180-degree turn, by April 2006 the cabinet had thrown out Tepaki’s diplomatic project (CIN, 5 April 2006, 1).

Another major government project proposal initiated during the year involved a NZ$10 million dollar parliamentary complex to be built in the Avatiu valley of Rarotonga. Plans included a three-story building to house central administration, ministerial offices, and support staff, opposition and mayoral offices, cafeteria, gym, and conference area. The concept design reflected a canoe with sail design roofing. Some public commentary pointing to hidden future increases in actual costs and the difficulty of guaranteeing funding have so far placed the plans on hold.

In the meantime, new Chinese aid projects were announced in January 2006, including a cyclone-proof highway alternative to the Nikao seawall in Rarotonga and an enclosed sports stadium. During that same month the Cook Islands government also signed a contract to build the island nation’s police station with full funding by the People’s Republic of China. Some sixty Chinese workers were expected on the construction site at its peak. By April 2006 China was offering the Cook Islands NZ$4 million more for infrastructure projects (CIN, 8 April 2006, 1). It did not go unnoticed that 165 countries worldwide had diplomatic ties with the People’s Republic of China. In July 1997, the Cook Islands had become one of nine Pacific Island countries to recognize China and its “One-China policy.” China had clearly been expanding its diplomatic presence in the Pacific region with embassies in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Tonga, Federated States of Micronesia, and Kiribati. In fact, China now has the largest number of diplomats in the region (CIN, 21 Sept 2005, 6).

During the period under review, the government approved a second television station to be run by The
Digital Factory. The first station, formerly run by the government, is now managed by the Pitt Group. Three new FM radio licenses were also issued by the government, for the Cook Islands Seventh-Day Adventist Mission (TK ANA 3 radio FM), Nicholas Henry of The Digital Factory (Tumutevarovaro radio FM), and Jeane Matenga, Elijah Communications Ltd (Radio Cook Islands FM). By March, The Digital Factory was on air with FM 88.1, and the Seventh-Day Adventist radio with TK ANA 3 on FM 98.7.

The government continued its crackdown on state houses, requiring expiring tenancy contracts to demonstrate qualification for any renewal consideration, as private money-lenders received much public criticism for deals that took away people’s lands (CIN, 14 July 2005, 4). Loan sharks were reportedly charging 24 percent interest plus additional illegal charges, such as real estate fees (CIN, 9 July 2005, 6).

The government continued appointing justices of the peace based on political favors and general acceptance without prior legal training, standards, or testing. This practice, as opposed to a more merit-based approach, is particularly problematic because justices of the peace have increasingly been allowed to sit on criminal and land cases, supposedly as a way of saving money. Bringing in judges from New Zealand dramatically reduced irregularities but drained the government budget. But allowing an untrained justice of the peace to decide on far-reaching criminal and land cases is clearly a disaster, given the family orientation and potential conflicts of interest that plague many small societies. I sat in on three cases involving a justice of the peace, and was frankly amazed at summations that reflected the justice’s personal or religious opinions with no bearing on the case. In private discussions, a senior policeman on Rarotonga shared his frustration over situations where criminals were allowed to walk free or receive a mere slap on the hand and a ridiculously low fine. On the other hand, defense lawyers argue that sloppy police work was more often the weakness of such cases.

The challenges facing Cook Islanders also include a continuing rise in the cost of living. The Cook Islands Workers Association tried to revive the cost-of-living adjustment for workers, a system established in 1970 by a Democratic Party government but later removed by a Cook Islands Party government. Public servants had had no cost-of-living adjustment since April 1992, when a 7 to 8 percent increase was adopted. It was not until May 2006 that the cabinet approved 12 percent pay rise and a NZ$5 per hour minimum-wage package.

Rising fuel costs continued to affect everyone, although they did not prevent Air New Zealand from achieving NZ$180 million record profit by the end of July 2005. During the year under review, Air New Zealand announces plans to withdraw its Christchurch to Rarotonga service, causing some concern among tourist operators in Rarotonga. It was expected that the dependence on oil-run power generators would mean that local power costs would rise 14 percent to 25.8 percent by June 2006.
In fact fuel prices forced local airline Air Rarotonga to increase fares by 10 percent while Virgin Blue Airlines focused on announcing plans to introduce twice-weekly flights from Auckland to Rarotonga, thus breaking Air New Zealand’s monopoly on the route.

A newly formed Cook Islands Black Pearl Jeweler Manufacturer’s Guild held its first meeting in January 2006, and by March work began on the NZ$1.5 million Avatiu Western Harbor Extension Program.

In May, Kainuku Kapiriterangi was invested as Ariki, filling the vacancy left by a previous holder who had passed away. Kainuku is one of two paramount chiefs for Takitumu district in Rarotonga. The island has a total of six paramount chiefs: Makea, Karika, Vakatini, Tinomana, Pa, and Kainuku. Also in the month of May, the new Cook Islands–based South Pacific School of Medicine opened its doors with four international students and much criticism about its legitimacy and credibility. Less controversial and more widely supported was the announcement of a million-dollar Pacific Islands Studies campus in Rarotonga for the University of the South Pacific.

A UNESCO report, released earlier, indicated that although the Cook Islands has 80 percent enrollment for early childhood education (preschool), a mere 50 percent of these students made it to grade five. The figures undoubtedly reflect continuing out-migration of Cook Islanders, although the UNESCO report does not comment on this (CIN, 22 Aug 2005, 1). While visiting the Cook Islands in September 2005, New Zealand’s Manukau City Mayor Sir Barry Curtis promised three more trades-based scholarships for Cook Islanders to attend the Manukau Institute of Technology.

Also during the year under review, the Cook Islands government decided to remove import levies except on particular items such as pork, soft drinks, pearls, fresh fruit, vegetables, alcohol, tobacco, fuel, and vehicles. Entomologist Dr Peter Maddison visited Rarotonga to help the Cook Islands Natural Heritage Project identify insects, and some one hundred new insects were soon documented; it was expected that the number would rise to 1,000 (CIN, 18 Aug 2005, 5). One hundred and ten applications were received by the end of May 2006 for fourteen advertised heads of ministry positions. In the health area, a new initiative to encourage HIV/AIDS prevention in the Cook Islands promoted a discount purchase card, on which were printed reminders about healthy living. Curiously, card holders are asked to promise to keep their bodies safe, to respect themselves, to care for themselves and those they love, to respect others and treat all people with dignity, and to help make their community a healthy and vibrant place. There are currently two reported cases of HIV in the Cook Islands (CIN, 29 Aug 2005, 1). A couple of residents I spoke to while in Rarotonga recently suggested that similar cards ought to be issued to politicians, who seem to quickly forget their promises once they win election.

On the agriculture front, there was some panic when immigration officials found seven Giant African snails on board an Air New Zealand flight
that had flown from Sāmoa via Auckland. The destructive snails are found widely in Sāmoa but have yet to become established in the Cook Islands. Meanwhile, the nono (or noni \[Morinda citifolia\]) industry continued to struggle with price undercutting from Asia, and pearl farming was not doing as well as expected.

During the year, the Cook Islands patrol boat Te Kukupa joined with Sāmoa patrol boat Nafanua and Kiribati patrol boat Teanoia to carry out exercises in their regional waters (\textit{CIN}, 30 July 2005, 1). Te Kukupa later set off to Australia for a nz$3 million refit funded by the Australian government. While visiting New Zealand, French Polynesia President Oscar Temaru suggested that regional governments consider a Pacific passport, modeled after the European Union passport (\textit{CIN}, 19 July 2005, 1). Temaru, who is part Cook Islander, received guarded support for this idea among Cook Islanders.

In a year of constant controversy, Cook Islands Religious Advisory Council leaders also spoke out. Church leaders openly contested the possibility of the Rev Sun Myung Moon’s Reunification Church (also known as the Moonies) being registered in the Cook Islands. Overseas trips to Korea by politicians funded by the church were particularly criticized. The Rev Tutai Pere, president of the religious council, was very outspoken on the issue. Other citizen concerns focused on the national Maire Maeva Nui celebrations, and the apprehension that the media might continue to be disallowed from covering the competitive dancing event (\textit{CIN}, 29 July 2005, 1). There were also other moments for celebration, such as when Sarah Noomaara won two gold medals for free sparring and special technique at the world tae kwon do championships in Australia, placing the Cook Islands sixth out of forty-nine participating countries (\textit{CIN}, 21 July 2005, 8).

During the year, the visit of a conman from Africa, who entered the Cook Islands under a false passport, continued to receive attention from senior public officials. While in Rarotonga the man had apparently tried to sell chemicals that would clean banknotes painted black by the banks for disposal. He was found guilty and sentenced to a year in jail, but before he could be deported his false passport was discovered. He also seemed to conveniently forget his country of origin, leaving the Cook Islands government wondering what to do with him. Suspected to be a Nigerian, he is the country’s first stateless person (\textit{CIN}, 24 Jan 2006, 1).

Also visiting were representatives of the US reality television show \textit{Survivor}, who chose Cook Islands as their next venue. The island of Aitutaki soon became their main location. Aitutaki landowners were given nz$100,000 by the Cook Islands government and the island council issued various restrictions on local movements to ensure the success of the program. The island council’s restrictions faced legal challenges but are not expected to affect the \textit{Survivor} participants and film crew on Aitutaki, an island well known for its hospitality. The \textit{Survivor} filming should be completed by July 2006 for subsequent release. This filming program in
Aitutaki will more than likely further inflate land and consumer goods prices, adding to the woes of locals.

JON TIKIVANOTAU M JONASSEN

References


FRENCH POLYNESIA

Political life in French Polynesia during the review period was still characterized by instability and uncertainty about the future, and had only cooled down slightly after the political crisis of 2004–2005. The new government under President Oscar Temaru, who had been inaugurated in March 2005, seemed to be firmly in power during most of 2005, but 2006 brought another attempted overthrow, following a split in the governing coalition. Among the general population, the original euphoria of a new policy of Taui Roa (Big Change) has to a large degree become replaced by a more sober sentiment as taui (change) is happening slower than people had hoped. Meanwhile, the relationship between the local government and the French state fluctuates between confrontation and reconciliation. Relations between French Polynesia and other Pacific Islands, on the other hand, are becoming closer and more frequent.

In July, the president’s uneasy attitude toward France became once more apparent, when he first announced his intention to boycott the official celebration on 14 July (Bastille Day, the French national holiday) but then finally agreed to participate (TP, 14 July 2005). Earlier that month, on 4 July, he had hosted a United States Independence Day celebration in the presidential palace, a gesture that was perceived as a provocation by the pro-French opposition (TP, 6 July 2005). Temaru also participated as a guest of honor in the national holiday celebrations of Vanuatu, Cook Islands, and Niue, each time underlining the importance of the achievement of independence (or full self-government), which his country still lacks.

Meanwhile, when new French High Commissioner Anne Boquet arrived on 10 September, replacing Michel Mathieu (who had tended to favor former President Gaston Flosse and his party and shun the Temaru government), hope rose for a more harmonious relationship between Papeete and Paris. Indeed, the initial relations between Boquet and the Temaru government were very friendly. On 15 September, the new high commissioner was greeted by Temaru and Assembly Speaker Antony Geros with a kava ceremony in the hall of the assembly building—an event that was perceived as a symbol both of reconciliation with the French state and of the country’s cultural “reintegration into Oceania,” since kava drinking had become virtually extinct in Tahitian culture (TPM, Oct 2005).

Reintegration into Oceania remains one of the main agenda items for the Temaru government, in the cultural as well as the political sense. At the annual Pacific Island Forum meeting in Port Moresby on 25 October, proposals were made to upgrade French Polynesia’s status from that of