

sure, the government scrapped the compulsory helmet law, inadvertently leaving some retail shops stuck with preordered supplies of helmets (*CIN*, 4 April 2008, 1). Police also began using laser guns to catch speeding drivers (*CIN*, 16 April 2008, 1).

In the 2007–2008 period, the Cook Islands Parliament passed an electoral amendment act that clearly defines the process by which a prime minister may be removed from office, either by the defeat of an annual appropriations budget, or a vote of no confidence.

The act also forces members to vote according to party lines or automatically lose their seats. This part of the act attempts to prevent the party hopping that has led to the formation of new governments outside of Parliament (*CIN*, 11 Aug 2007, 1).

Secretary of Foreign Affairs Edwin Pitman resigned from his post after fifteen years of service (*CIN*, 14 Nov 2007, 1). To the surprise of many, Minister of Foreign Affairs Wilkie Rasmussen selected fellow lawyer and former British honorary representative Mike Mitchell to succeed Pitman (*CIN*, 16 Jan 2008, 1). Public criticism emerged over the appointment because Mitchell is only a permanent resident, not a Cook Islander (*CIN*, 17 Jan 2008, 4). This was especially troubling as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for immigration, and controls the process for issuing permanent-resident status. It was noted that Mitchell's expertise lay in areas other than foreign affairs, and Cook Islanders were insulted that qualified local candidates were not considered (*CIN*, 19 Jan 2008, 1, 4). Mitchell reviewed the Cook Islands' overseas offices, and after determining that the consulate in

Hawai'i was no longer justified, it was closed (*CIN*, 1 March 2008, 1).

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### FRENCH POLYNESIA

With three changes of governments, political instability in French Polynesia increased further during the period under review. Reform of the country's political system and fresh elections, both unilaterally imposed by Paris, served to further aggravate the situation. Meanwhile, the local political scene was being reconfigured, with once staunchly pro-French leader Gaston Flosse allying himself with his pro-independence archrival Oscar Temaru, while many of Flosse's former allies formed a heterogeneous pro-French coalition under Gaston Tong Sang.

In mid-July, the governing pro-French coalition under President Tong Sang, formed in late December 2006 out of Flosse's *Tahoeraa Huiraatira* (People's Rally) party and several splinter groups opposed to the previous pro-independence president, Oscar Temaru, broke apart after barely six months in existence. An internal power struggle between Flosse and Tong Sang had been going on for several months, but it escalated during Tong Sang's visit to Paris in early July. Tong Sang and his delegation met French President Nicolas Sarkozy

and negotiated contracts with several French ministries (*NT*, 10 July 2008). However, assembly Speaker Edouard Fritch, Flosse's son-in-law, and other leading Tahoeraa members were not part of the delegation and complained about the lack of discussion about the contracts in the assembly before the trip (*NT*, 7 July 2007; *TPM*, Aug 2007).

As a result, shortly after Tong Sang's return from Paris, the five Tahoeraa ministers in Tong Sang's cabinet resigned, and the party decided to withdraw from the coalition, leaving Tong Sang and his remaining coalition partners in a minority position (*DT*, 19 July 2007).

One day later, Flosse announced that he had had talks with opposition leader Temaru and was ready to form a new governing coalition (*DT*, 20 July 2007). He advocated a reconciliation of the two historically opposed political blocks, and an agreement to respect each other's political convictions and work for the common good (*NT*, 21 July 2007). When French Secretary of State for Overseas Territories Christian Estrosi criticized the proposal, Flosse accused him of having a colonialist attitude (*NT*, 23 July 2007). In an extraordinary party convention on 25 July, Tahoeraa approved the withdrawal from Tong Sang's government and the negotiations with Temaru. However, Flosse had insisted on an open vote instead of a secret ballot (*DT*, 26 July 2007). Subsequently, the party encountered many problems with dissidents who deserted to Tong Sang, thus weakening Flosse's position (*TPM*, Oct 2007).

Flosse's maneuver surprised many observers, but it can be explained in terms of the changing political land-

scape in Paris. Since Sarkozy took over the presidency from Jacques Chirac in May, the latter's close friend Flosse no longer receives special support from Paris. Instead, Sarkozy has made his preference for Tong Sang quite obvious. As he demonstrated earlier in his career, Flosse is much more a power politician than an ideologue (he changed from an apologist of authoritarian colonial rule to an ardent supporter of local autonomy in the early 1980s). He was ready to ally with the pro-independence camp in order to undermine the new Sarkozy–Tong Sang axis and keep himself in a position of power.

After Tong Sang's attempts in consultations with Tahoeraa leaders to save his minority government failed, Temaru's UPLD (Union for Democracy) coalition filed a motion of censure against the government. This was adopted by the assembly on 31 August with an ample majority of 35 votes, combining those of UPLD with those of Tahoeraa (*TPM*, Sept 2007). Tong Sang had attempted to delay his overthrow by filing a procedural complaint, and on 8 September about 2,500 people marched through the streets of Papeete in support of the ousted president (*DT*, 9 Sept 2007). However, the show of force was to no avail (*TPM*, Sept 2007).

For the election of a new president on 13 September, Tahoeraa came up with a new twist. It denied any alliance with the UPLD and presented Edouard Fritch as its own candidate to run against Temaru and Tong Sang. As none of them could receive the overall majority required to be elected, Flosse's strategy was apparently to force a second round of voting, in

which he hoped Tong Sang's supporters would vote for Fritch because of their ideological opposition to Temaru. However, two days before the election, the French Council of State (the highest administrative court) decided that a relative majority would be sufficient in the second round of voting. Temaru was elected president once more with a relative majority of 26 votes, and in his inaugural speech he thanked Flosse for his indirect support (*DT*, 12 Sept 2007; *NT*, 12 Sept 2007; *DT*, 14 Sept 2007; *TPM*, Oct 2007).

On 18 September, Temaru presented his new cabinet of sixteen ministers, almost identical to that during his previous term. The only new faces were former assembly Speaker Antony Geros as vice president instead of Jacqui Drollet, and pearl dealer Marc Collins as minister of tourism (*DT*, 19 Sept 2007; *NT*, 19 Sept 2007; *TPM*, Oct 2007). Tahoeraa refused to participate in the government, but agreed not to file a motion of censure against Temaru's minority government and cooperate with the UPLD in the assembly.

The change of government cast a cloud over the meeting of Pacific Islands royal families on Marae Taputapuatea on the island of Raiatea from 12 to 14 September. The meeting was organized by the royal customary council association Na Huiarii Mata Ara e Pae under the leadership of Tahitian royal family descendant Joinville Pomare and with the support of the Tong Sang government. The organizers hoped to reunite all the chiefly families of Polynesia on the famed marae (ancient temple), which was the spiritual and political center of Eastern Polynesia until about 600

years ago, and from which ancient voyages of exploration departed for destinations as distant as New Zealand and Hawai'i. The guests included Māori King Tuheitia, Paramount Chief Tumu Te Heuheu of Ngāti Tūwharetoa (who was also Chairperson of the UNESCO world heritage committee); the president of the Cook Islands' House of Ariki, Ada Rongomatane Ariki; several other Cook Islands high chiefs and the country's prime minister, Jim Marurai; Princess Malia Kulimoetoke of Uvea (Wallis); a chief from Futuna; a delegation of chiefly descendants from Rapa Nui; and a chiefly descendant from Hawai'i. Also present were two Kanak chiefs from the Customary Senate of New Caledonia. During the three-day meeting, the delegates discussed the role of traditional leaders in the contemporary Pacific, and signed a declaration to commit themselves to the preservation of the cultural heritage of Polynesia. In the presence of UNESCO official Te Heuheu, the participants also supported listing Marae Taputapuatea as a world heritage site (*DT*, 11, 13, 15 Sept 2007; *TPM*, Oct 2007).

Invitees from Sāmoa and Tonga, on the other hand, cancelled their already confirmed participation at the last minute after receiving a diplomatic note cosigned by Gaston Flosse and Oscar Temaru urging them not to attend the meeting because of the ongoing change of government (*TP*, 6 Sept 2007). The two leaders apparently feared that the meeting, sponsored by Tong Sang, could give the latter an unintended boost by raising his profile among Pacific Islands leaders. Temaru initially refused to hold the reception for the chiefly guests

scheduled by Tong Sang in the Papeete presidential palace. After some negotiations, the reception did finally take place in a lukewarm atmosphere.

Temaru and Pomare, both long-time pro-independence leaders, have strong disagreements on the political shape the future independent country might take. While Temaru favors a system of Western-style democracy, Pomare advocates the restoration of a political role for traditional leaders, as well as the re-creation of customary land tribunals. Because of these and other disagreements, Pomare has allied himself with Tong Sang and other pro-French politicians.

Since Tong Sang was ousted by his own party, it was not surprising that soon after the consolidation of the new Tahoeraa-tolerated Temaru minority government, he formally resigned his Tahoeraa membership and founded his own party on 28 September. It was named O Porinetia To Tatou Ai'a (Polynesia Is Our Country), and consisted of Tahoeraa dissidents mainly from the Leeward Islands, as well as a few veteran politicians with other affiliations (*TP*, 28 Sept 2007). On 11 October, Tong Sang signed a partnership agreement with former Temaru ally Emile Vernaudon's Ai'a Api (New Homeland) party, Philip Schyle's formerly centrist Fetia Api (New Star), and several small pro-French splinter parties under the umbrella name of To Tatou Ai'a (Our Land) (*TPM*, Nov 2007). After some hesitation, the alliance was also joined on 27 November by Jean-Christophe Bouissou's Rautahi (Unity) party, another, earlier Tahoeraa dissident group.

Meanwhile, in reaction to the

constant political instability, the French government revised the political statute governing the territory. On 1 August, Secretary of State Estrosi announced that his office was preparing this, and anticipated elections in early 2008 (*TPM*, Sept 2007). He consulted various local political leaders during the two following months, receiving mixed reactions. Tong Sang and his allied splinter parties supported Estrosi's proposal, while the two large parties, Tahoeraa and UPLD, declined. In order to create more stable majorities, the revision included a new voting system for the assembly of French Polynesia, which in the future will be elected through a proportional system in two rounds of voting. Only lists that receive more than 12.5 percent in the first round can participate in the runoff ballot, and lists that receive more than 5 percent are allowed to merge with one of the larger lists. In addition, the president of French Polynesia can no longer be overthrown in a motion of censure, but only in a "motion of defiance," which means the simultaneous election of a successor. The Speaker of the assembly, whose yearly reelection had caused political turmoil in the past, will in the future be elected only once for the full five-year legislative term. Furthermore, the new statute includes more stringent control mechanisms on the use of French subsidies by the local government in order to prevent embezzlement, corruption, and bad governance (*NT*, 20 Sept 2007; *TPM*, Oct and Dec 2008).

On 4 October, the assembly held a nonbinding vote on the proposal, and rejected it with an overwhelming majority; UPLD and Tahoeraa

denounced it as interference in the country's autonomy, and as reminiscent of colonialism. However, when Temaru met Sarkozy in Paris a few days later, on 9 October, he was informed that early elections in January under the new system were a done deal (*TPM*, Nov 2007). In spite of overwhelming local opposition, the reform was rushed through the French parliament. It passed the National Assembly on 22 November and the Senate on 30 November, with votes from Sarkozy's UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) and allied right-wing parties prevailing over the opposition French Socialist party (*TPM*, Dec 2008). This episode proved once more that the statute of autonomy does not guarantee real local self-government, as France remains able to make arbitrary modifications to its political system against the explicit will of the local assembly.

It was only logical, therefore, that at the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, on 15 October, President Temaru reiterated the demand to reinscribe French Polynesia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories, from which France had removed the territory unilaterally in 1947 (*TPM*, Nov 2007; July 2008).

Political corruption is a pressing issue, now affecting every political camp. Efforts to fight it through political and judicial means have been largely ineffective. On 12 October, Jean-Paul Barral, the new Temaru appointee at the head of the Post and Telecommunications Office, drastically cut his own salary and removed all additional benefits associated with the position. Previous officeholders, especially those under the ministry

of Emile Vernaudeau in the first two Temaru governments, had grossly abused these privileges and embezzled large amounts of funds, a scandal that provoked massive public criticism (*TPM*, Nov 2007).

On 29 November, a Papeete court confirmed the sentences of 23 individuals including former President Flosse for embezzlement of public funds through the creation of so-called "fictional employments," ruling that they needed to reimburse a total of 308 million CFP francs (US\$3.5 million) of fraudulently received salaries, in addition to fines (*TPM*, Dec 2007).

The most spectacular effort by the local judiciary in the prosecution of corruption was the arrest of Emile Vernaudeau on 4 December for his role in the post office embezzlement scandal. In sharp contrast to the previous lenient treatment of corrupt politicians, Vernaudeau was placed in detention for the following four months until completion of the judicial inquiry (*TPM*, Jan 2007).

The specter of outer-island secession also reemerged. On 31 October, the mayor of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas, Guy Rauzy, and his colleague Teina Maraueura of Rangiroa in the Tuamotus suggested to Secretary of State Estrosi that their respective archipelagos should remain French territories in the event of Tahiti's independence (*TPM*, Dec 2007). During the Marquesas Islands festival on 17 December, which Estrosi attended, Mayor Joseph Kaiha of the Marquesas island of Ua Pou publicly demanded the creation of a separate French overseas entity for the Marquesas. This led to strong and polemic reactions from Temaru and Flosse,

who accused Kaiha and Estrosi of attempting to dismantle the territorial integrity of the country. A protest march called by Temaru's party on 22 December attracted 1,200 participants in downtown Papeete (*TPM*, Jan 2008). The idea of Marquesan secession has existed in local political debates for decades, but it had never sparked such passionate reactions.

The focus on the country's unity was probably a result of the electoral campaign of December and January. While President Temaru attempted to revive the popular support for change that had brought him to power in 2004 and 2005, and focused on denouncing ongoing French colonialism, Tong Sang claimed to be the only competent and reasonable politician capable of reunifying the population and working constructively with Paris. Flosse, on the other hand, distanced himself from Temaru and stressed his pro-French ideology, while denouncing Tong Sang as an imposter and emphasizing the long period of political stability under his previous term in office from 1991 to 2004 (*TPM*, Jan and Feb 2008).

The two election rounds, on 27 January and 10 February, brought a surprising development as Tong Sang's recently formed alliance of splinter parties won a relative majority in both of them. In the first ballot, To Tatou Ai'a, including allied party lists on the Tuamotu and Marquesas islands, achieved 36.52 percent of the vote, considerably more than the UPLD with 32.83 percent, while Tahoeraa with 21.82 percent came far behind. Nicole Bouteau's small No Oe E Te Nunaa (For You, People) party—the only one that had constantly upheld its

high moral standards and that did not participate in power plays—reached the fourth position with 5.40 percent, and was thus the only minor party qualified for an eventual merger with one of the three leading lists. Ten other lists received less than 1 percent each (*TP*, 28 Jan 2008).

During the campaign, and even more so between the two election rounds, the actions and attitude of Secretary of State Estrosi were strongly criticized. Over a period of several months preceding the election, Estrosi visited Tahiti unusually often, each time demonstrating a conspicuously positive attitude toward Tong Sang. Immediately after the first election round, Estrosi telephoned Nicole Bouteau and Gaston Flosse, and advised them to merge with Tong Sang's list for the second ballot. Bouteau refused and expressed her indignation at the secretary's interference in the electoral process, preferring to uphold her dignity and leave active politics for the time being (*TPM*, Feb 2008). Flosse also refused, so the three leading lists went unchanged into the runoff. At the same time, the leadership of the ruling French UMP party congratulated Estrosi for the "successful carrying out of the election," reinforcing the impression that he had interfered in the election process in Tong Sang's favor. Both Flosse and Temaru expressed their indignation, and Temaru subsequently filed a legal complaint against Estrosi (*TPM*, Feb 2008).

The results of the runoff ballot reinforced the tendencies apparent in the first round. To Tatou Ai'a received 45.12 percent and gained 27 of the 57 seats in the assembly, two short of the

overall majority. UPLD received 37.18 percent of the votes and 20 seats, whereas Tahoeraa fell further behind, gaining only 17.16 percent and 10 seats.

To Tatou Ai'a's lists led the ballot in four of the six electoral constituencies. In the traditional Tahoeraa stronghold of Pirae, To Tatou Ai'a gained an absolute majority of votes. UPLD was the leading party in Temaru's stronghold of Faa'a, as well as in the Tahoeraa-ruled municipalities of Paea, Pajara, Moorea, and Taputapuatea, and in the constituency of the Eastern Tuamotu islands. Tahoeraa, on the other hand, which had lead the vote in most of the outer islands in the last elections in 2004, achieved a majority only in the Austral Islands constituency (*NT*, 11 Feb 2008; *DT*, 11 Feb 2008).

In spite of Tong Sang's surprising success, no party held an overall majority in the assembly, necessitating the formation of a governing coalition. Estrosi once more attempted to interfere in the election process by calling on Flosse to ally with Tong Sang, an action which suggested that Paris wanted to remove Temaru from the presidency at all cost (*DT*, 11 Feb 2008).

Tong Sang and Fritch subsequently began negotiations to form a coalition, but these failed because of Tahoeraa's excessive demands. Flosse then negotiated with Temaru, but the talks were suspended when Tong Sang declared he would fulfill all of Flosse's requests. According to their coalition agreement, Fritch was reelected Speaker of the assembly with the votes of To Tatou Ai'a and Tahoeraa in the constituting session on 22 February. In the

second session on 23 February, however, during which Tong Sang was supposed to be elected president, Flosse made yet another unexpected move. The night before he had suspended the ongoing talks with Tong Sang, and instead made an agreement to form a governing coalition with UPLD. At the last minute, Temaru withdrew his candidacy, and Flosse was elected president with a bare majority of the combined 29 votes of Tahoeraa and UPLD against the 27 votes for Tong Sang. One unknown representative had abstained. Assembly Speaker Fritch subsequently resigned, and Temaru was elected on 29 February to replace him. As another part of the deal, UPLD and Tahoeraa formed a common parliamentary caucus called UDSP (Union for Development, Stability and Peace), which enabled them to obtain the leading positions in the assembly's administration and on the various committees (*TPM*, March 2008).

In his inaugural speech, Flosse said it was time to stop the ideological debate between independence supporters and autonomists (in local politics, the autonomists are considered pro-French), and form instead a government of unity in order to work for the future of the country. As the most experienced of the three leaders, he claimed to be the most suitable to lead the coalition and act as arbiter between the two opposing factions of To Tatou Ai'a and UPLD (*TP*, 23 Feb 2008).

Temaru argued that Flosse was the lesser of two evils, considering it more important to prevent the election of Tong Sang, who he regards as a French puppet. The latter, on the other

hand, vehemently refused Flosse's offer to participate in the government, and many To Tatou Ai'a members and supporters were outraged at what they perceived as a distortion of the election results and thus a defrauding of the voters. On 1 March, a large protest march was organized by To Tatou Ai'a in downtown Papeete, rallying about 9,000 people (*TPM*, March and April 2008). However, the protestors seemed to forget that French Polynesia has a parliamentary, rather than a presidential system, and a relative majority of seats does not guarantee a party the right to hold the presidency.

Secretary of State Estrosi refused to congratulate Flosse and merely "took notice" of his presidency. A spokesperson of the UMP party, of which Flosse has been a member for decades, announced it would break off all official contacts with Tahoeraa, which used to be the UMP's local affiliate. He accused Flosse of betraying the ideals of UMP by forming an alliance "against nature" (*TP*, 24 Feb 2008).

On 28 February, President Flosse presented his cabinet, consisting of 15 ministers—5 from Tahoeraa, including Edouard Fritch as vice president, and 10 from UPLD, primarily those who served in Flosse's and Temaru's previous cabinets. An exception was Temaru's daughter Teua Temaru, a young marine biologist with no previous political experience, who became minister of environment (*TP*, 28 Feb 2008).

Analyzing the election results and their aftermath and comparing them with those of 2004 (outer islands) and 2005 (by-election on Tahiti and Moorea), one can make the following observations. The UPLD lost a con-

siderable amount of support, as many voters became disappointed with the performance of Temaru's governments, which failed to sufficiently implement their electoral platform of good governance and social justice. A decisive element for the UPLD's loss of a majority was also the defection of Emile Vernaudon's Ai'a Api party, originally the second-largest component of the UPLD, to Tong Sang's party. The core element of UPLD, Temaru's pro-independence Tavini Huiraatira (People's Servant) party, on the other hand, remains comparatively strong.

Most remarkable was Tong Sang's performance and his ability to gain a relative majority when his party had been in existence for only a few months. He successfully presented himself as the embodiment of renewal and good governance, despite the fact that he had been a cabinet minister under Flosse for many years and was under judicial inquiry because of his involvement in a corruption affair in the early 2000s. In addition, many of his allies are suspected of corruption, or regarded as notorious opportunists. One explanation for his electoral success was that many voters felt insecure because of France's uncooperative attitude toward the Temaru governments, and longed for political stability and a secure flow of financial subsidies from Paris. This made them feel compelled to vote for the candidate favored by Paris. Also important were the massive number of votes cast for Tong Sang by the steadily growing number of French settlers, as well as those of the economically influential Chinese community, of which Tong Sang is a part.

The demise of the once all-powerful



Tahoeraa can be explained through the party's split following the quarrel between Flosse and Tong Sang. An important section of the former Tahoeraa electorate, including the French settlers, the Chinese community, and the Polynesian upper class, almost completely defected to Tong Sang, an observation clearly confirmed by Tong Sang's absolute majorities in all upper-class suburban neighborhoods. Apart from a few individuals from these social classes who are personally tied to Flosse, Tahoeraa only retains hold on its core electorate among the rural and working-class Polynesian population, which tends to be critical of France. Since Temaru's core electorate comes from the same social class, the political alliance of the two leaders is not as illogical as it might seem at first glance.

Electoral campaigning was far from over, however. On 9 and 16 March, municipal elections took place, which largely confirmed the tendencies of the preceding territorial elections. Unsurprisingly, Oscar Temaru was reelected with an overall majority in the first round as mayor of Faa'a, the country's largest municipality, a position he has held since 1983. In a similar landslide, Gaston Tong Sang was reelected mayor of the island of Bora Bora. President Flosse's Tahoeraa, on the other hand, suffered further defeats. In the party's former stronghold of Pirae, Edouard Fritch lost the mayoralty to Beatrice Vernaudon (To Tatou Ai'a), and in the third largest township of Punaauia, long-serving Tahoeraa mayor Jacques Vii was defeated by another Tong Sang supporter, Rony Tumahai. In Papeete, the capital and second largest city, Mayor Michel

Buillard was reelected, but only after having switched his allegiance from Tahoeraa to To Tatou Ai'a. In the township of Mahina, the long-serving, now Tong Sang-allied Mayor Emile Vernaudon, was reelected in absentia, since he was detained on embezzlement charges throughout the electoral campaign (*TP*, 10, 17 March).

On the outer islands, the picture was less clear, with many lists reflecting local issues more than Papeete politics. Two of Tong Sang's allies most notorious for their frequent change of allegiance, Marcellin Lisan of Huahine and Temauri Foster of Hao in the Tuamotus, lost their mayoralties to local alliances between Tahoeraa and UPLD (*TP*, 17, 22 March 2008).

After the municipal elections, political agitation calmed down a little, and the new government was able to deliver its first major achievement. On 19 March, the UDSP majority in the assembly adopted the 2008 budget of 161.29 billion CFP francs (US\$2.03 billion), which had been originally introduced by Temaru's government in December 2007 but was then vetoed by Tahoeraa.

Another example of the constructive policy of the UDSP alliance was the nuclear issue. The government-affiliated Orientation Council on the Follow-up on Nuclear Testing (COSCEN) was maintained by the Flosse government. In early March it met with the French government's delegate on nuclear safety, Jurien de la Gravière, to coordinate the cleanup of military sites on the islands and atolls surrounding the former testing ground. While visiting Mangareva, one of the islands targeted for cleanup, de la Gravière, along with a COSCEN

delegation, supervised the deconstruction of a 1960s antinuclear shelter, the material of which will be used to seal parts of the island's road (*TP*, 2, 3 April 2008). He promised also to help in the restoration and maintenance of Mangareva's St Michael's Cathedral, the oldest and largest nineteenth-century Catholic church building in the Pacific. The cathedral is a historic monument that has fallen into disrepair and is threatened with collapse (*TP*, 5 April 2008). A few weeks after de la Gravière's visit, the territorial health office announced a series of missions to examine and supervise the health of former test workers and inhabitants exposed to radiation (21 March 2008).

Even though electoral campaigning was definitely over, a new twist in the political drama began to unfold in early April. Michel Yip and Justine Teura, two UPLD assembly representatives from the outer islands, resigned from the UDSP caucus and allied themselves with a group of outer-island representatives of To Tatou Ai'a, who had previously formed a third parliamentary caucus named Te Mana o te Motu (The Power of the Islands). This was apparently a tactical maneuver in order to make Yip's and Teura's floor crossing appear less extreme (*TP*, 8 April 2008). Shortly after the formation of the new caucus, Tong Sang and his supporters filed a motion of defiance against Flosse (*TP*, 10 April 2008).

At first Temaru and Flosse appeared little impressed, and the next day they presented a declaration underlining the commitment to their coalition government with a detailed governing platform (*TP*, 11 Apr 2008). In the

following session of the assembly on 15 April, however, the motion of defiance was passed with a bare majority of 29 votes against 27 and 1 abstention. After less than two months in office, the Flosse government had been overthrown and Tong Sang was once again president (*TP*, 15 April 2008).

In his inaugural speech, the new president emphasized that his election finally took into account the popular election results of February, and promised to pursue an impartial and citizen-oriented form of governance. Flosse and Temaru, on the other hand, questioned the legitimacy of the change of government because it was the result of representatives' floor-crossing.

The French government demonstrated once more its partisan support for Tong Sang, as President Sarkozy and other French government officials congratulated the new Polynesian president immediately after his election. Two months before, Flosse had not received any such congratulations from Paris (*TPM*, May 2008).

On 19 April, Tong Sang announced his cabinet, composed of 14 ministers, most of them unchanged from those in his cabinet in 2007. Jules Ienfa became the new vice president (*TP*, 19 Apr 2008). Interestingly, Teva Huiotu-Hapaitahaa, son-in-law of Michel Yip, became minister of pearl farming and interisland communications, and Justine Teura's daughter Ottine Teura obtained the portfolio of outer-island development. This reinforced the impression that the two turncoat representatives were "bought" by promising them ministerial portfolios for their family members (*TP*, 19 Apr 2008). Tong Sang also convinced

Tahoeraa representative Armelle Merceron to join the cabinet as minister of solidarity and housing. In addition, he offered a fifteenth cabinet position to a member of UPLD, but this was declined (*TPM*, May 2008).

The latest change of government demonstrated that the chronic political instability continues despite the political reforms intended to end it. Since 2004, the country has seen only bare majorities, and an ever-increasing number of politicians have adopted an opportunist pattern of behavior, whereby they join whichever party is most likely to form the majority.

Only eleven days after his inauguration, Tong Sang reshuffled his cabinet, appointing Louis Frébault as minister for development planning after his wife, a To Tatou Ai'a assembly member from the Marquesas islands, had threatened to cross the floor. Two weeks later, To Tatou Ai'a representative Fernand Roomataroa from the Austral Islands was appointed minister of agriculture, after he criticized Tong Sang and threatened defection to Tahoeraa (*PIR*, 16 May 2008).

Despite his promises of good governance, President Tong Sang's administration has thus followed the patterns of opportunism and nepotism that have become typical of all local governments. Another example is the Office of Postal Services and Telecommunications, where Tong Sang resumed the deplorable practice of replacing existing officers with political cronies. The honest and efficient Jean-Paul Barral, maintained in office under Flosse, was removed by Tong Sang on 9 May and replaced as director by Jean-Christophe Bouissou's associate Moana Blanchard, who had

previously left a poor record as administrator of another territorial agency (*TPM*, June 2008). In June, the daughter of Hiro Tefaarere—a To Tatou Ai'a representative notorious for his erratic switches of allegiance—was appointed to a minor position at the post office, after her father had threatened another floor-crossing (*TPM*, July 2008).

The political unrest continued throughout the month of May, taking the form of a constant quarrel between Tong Sang's government and the UDSP opposition. When the government submitted a series of contracts of financial assistance and cooperation that were to be signed with the French government and submitted to the assembly for approval on 6 May, Speaker Temaru refused to open the session, deferring it instead to a date after the president's planned trip to Paris. A subsequent attempt by the To Tatou Ai'a caucus members to hold their own assembly session in another building was declared invalid by the French High Commission (*TP*, 7 May 2008). The contracts were eventually approved, while Tong Sang was already in Paris, and signed by President Sarkozy on 27 May. The two presidents spoke of "turning the pages" toward a new era of transparency and cooperation between Paris and Papeete, denouncing "ancient practices" that had been detrimental to the country's image (*TPM*, June 2008). This was quite ironic, as Tong Sang and his supporters have participated in these "ancient practices" just as much as their adversaries. While promising a stricter scrutiny of the French government over the local government's finances, the signed contracts essentially renewed French

subsidies for various local businesses and government agencies. A real, substantial difference from the practices of previous administrations remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, all indicators showed that the country's economy was not performing well. The tourism sector continued to decline, and many territorial services did not function well, due to constant changes of staff positions depending on the current governments in office. These effects can be ultimately linked to the country's political instability, which is deplored by all sectors (*TPM*, May and June 2008).

On 29 June, the territorial holiday commemorating the enactment of the 1984 statute of internal autonomy, as well as the annexation of Tahiti by France in 1880, was celebrated by the presidency with great pomp. During the evening of the controversial holiday, Temaru and his supporters held their traditional ceremony at a monument in Faa'a to honor Tahitian soldiers who fell during the resistance to French colonization in the 1840s. This year, Gaston Flosse, who had briefly attended parts of the autonomy celebrations in the morning, participated in the Faa'a ceremony for the first time. He laid a wreath and spoke in honor of Polynesian resistance against France, including on his home island of Mangareva. He called for a greater, more visible monument to be built (*TP*, 30 June 2008). Since for decades Flosse had denounced the monument and Temaru's commemorations as anti-French propaganda, his shift in attitude once more caused widespread consternation (*TPM*, Aug 2008).

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## MĀORI ISSUES

In the latter part of 2007, relations between Māori and the New Zealand government came close to the breaking point. A raid carried out by a New Zealand Police armed defenders squad in full combat gear traumatized a small Māori community in the central North Island on 15 October, just weeks after the NZ government had joined Australia, Canada, and the United States to vote against the adoption of a United Nations declaration on indigenous rights. The raid coincided with the release of a government report showing that almost 20 percent of Māori currently live in Australia. Many had left New Zealand for better economic opportunities, but also "to escape the perceived prejudice of Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) and mainstream negativity about Māori issues" (Hamer 2007, 14). Yet by mid-2008, with polls indicating the likelihood of a change of government in the upcoming general election, Māori started reaping the benefits of a government desperate for our support, particularly in settling Māori land claims.