Polynesia in Review: Issues and Events, 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1990

Reviews of Tonga, Tuvalu, and Wallis and Futuna are not included in this issue because of unforeseen circumstances.

American Samoa

The devastation wrought by Cyclone Ofa was the most dramatic event of 1989–90. This was the first hurricane to affect the entire Samoan archipelago since 1966. It followed only three years after Cyclone Tusi, which caused extensive damage in the Manu'a Islands. Ofa swept through the Samoas during the first week of February 1990 leaving millions of dollars in damage to property, businesses, and government services. The Territorial Emergency Management Coordinating Office immediately began to survey the extent of damage, and within days President Bush declared the territory a disaster area. Fortunately, no lives were lost during the hurricane.

Relief from off-island was immediate and well coordinated. The Federal Emergency Management Agency began accepting claims on 16 February, and grants were made available to families that did not qualify for loans. The US Navy sent thirty Seabees to assist the American Samoa Power Authority to restore electricity to outlying villages.

Prior to the hurricane, the territory's financial crisis had dominated local political affairs, and there was a continuing executive-legislative stalemate over the governor's proposed 3 percent excise tax. In October 1989 Governor Coleman introduced a Financial Recovery Plan, which included a list of various causes of the $18-million-dollar deficit, a projected deficit summary, and proposed solutions to the problem. He continued to claim that the previous Lutali administration was responsible for the financial dilemma, and emphasized the importance of cooperation from the legislature *(fono)* in order to avert a reduction in government employees' working hours and layoffs. Annual step increments for fiscal year 1990 had already been frozen, and it soon became apparent that the administration was prepared to squeeze the workforce further. On 6 December 1989 the governor announced that, unless the *fono* repealed the 2 percent sales tax and passed the proposed 3 percent excise tax, government employees' working hours would be reduced to thirty-five per week.

The *fono* had already acted on several of the administration's proposed revenue-raising measures during the November special session called by Governor Coleman. Taxes on tobacco, alcohol, poker machines, and firearms products were raised, but there was no movement on the excise tax issue. While the governor's criticism of the *fono* was quite open, he remained silent when it became known that the director of human resources had ignored a general directive and authorized more than thirty thousand dollars

worth of salary increases for several employees in his department.

There was strong opposition to the thirty-five-hour work week when it went into effect on 15 January, especially among the public school teachers. The teachers were upset that the governor's order did not affect employees who were considered to be providing "essential services." The American Samoa Education Association and the Concerned Parents of American Samoa organized a series of meetings at which various courses of action, including a teachers' walkout, were discussed. A petition was drawn up and circulated publicly while representatives tried to get legislators to support *fono* action to restore normal working hours. There was widespread agreement among the public that workers were being penalized for a financial crisis caused by corruption in government.

On 23 February 1990, in the wake of Cyclone Ofa, Governor Coleman announced that the forty-hour work week would be restored, and other pronouncements concerning the financial crisis mysteriously went with the wind. The 3 percent excise tax had finally died in the Senate in the week prior to the hurricane. At the end of the period under review, American Samoans were waiting for further revelations regarding the effectiveness of the Financial Recovery Plan and the status of the government deficit.

The present Coleman administration, like all its locally elected predecessors since 1977, has not demonstrated prudent financial management. For example, the 1989 inspector general's audit attributed annual losses of $2 million to mismanagement in the tax and customs offices. Nor has the administration taken appropriate action to reduce government expenditures, especially by cutting back on unnecessary hirings and promotions. Although more than 80 percent of the annual budget is spent on wages and salaries, leaders have failed to recognize that increasing taxes and reducing working hours delay rather than solve deficit problems.

The race for the territory's seat in the US House of Representatives was beginning to take shape at the end of the period under review. Two new candidates, Moaali'itele Tu'ufuli, former commissioner of public safety, and Afoa Moega Lutu, former assistant attorney general, issued the challenge to incumbent Faleomavaega Eni Hunkin. Congressman Hunkin maintained a sound measure of popularity both within the territory and with constituents in Hawai'i and on the US mainland, and will be counting on this support for reelection in November 1990.

BILL LEGALLEY

Cook Islands

Editors' note: The 1988–89 review of the Cook Islands published in Volume 2(1) of the journal stated on page 165 that the Cook Islands Party "won 13 of the 24 seats" in parliament. In fact, it won 12 seats. We would like to apologize to the authors of the review for this error, and for any embarrassment it may have caused them.

It was generally a good year for the government, but not for the opposi-