

Fiji

Fiji's three coups have each occurred in two stanzas: first an illegal overthrow of the elected government, and then a later abrogation of the constitution. Unlike its predecessors, the 5 December 2006 coup took twenty-eight months to reach the second denouement. On 10 April 2009, the constitution was ditched, the judiciary sacked, and the scheduled date for elections was pushed back to 2014. The military was digging itself in for the long haul, in defiance of domestic and international protest. Domestic criticism was to be silenced by stiff media censorship, public emergency regulations, travel bans, corruption charges, clandestine firebombs, as well as cancellation of pensions. The inevitable storm of international protest after 10 April was less easily silenced. In response, military commander and interim Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Frank Bainimarama claimed to be a victim of Australian and New Zealand "bullying" and appealed for solidarity from the Melanesian Spearhead Group states. Over 2009, as Bainimarama's enemies faltered, he visibly grew in domestic self-confidence. On the international stage, he projected an image of a wronged and misunderstood champion of modernism in Fiji.

In January 2009, Bainimarama refused to attend a meeting of Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) leaders in Port Moresby, insisting that severe flooding in Fiji required him to stay home to assist clean-up operations. The PIF

meeting, attended instead by Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, settled on yet another ultimatum to Fiji's interim government, insisting that a credible timetable for elections be drawn up by 1 May. Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said "a line in the sand" had been drawn (*Post Courier* 2009). Bainimarama responded that he had no intention of complying with the ultimatum and said that the inevitable suspension should have been immediate (FijiLive, 29 Jan 2009). His nonattendance at the PIF summit generated some controversy within the ranks of the interim administration. Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ratu Isoa Gavidia and Fiji's High Commissioner to PNG Ratu Isoa Tikoca were both sacked after urging Bainimarama to make an appearance in Port Moresby. Gavidia said later that Bainimarama's familiarity with top-down military authority made it difficult for him to accept advice (*Fiji Times*, 3 March 2009). Over the course of 2009, other regime insiders urging a more conciliatory stance—including Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office Parmesh Chand, as well as Robin Nair and former Citizen's Constitutional Forum activist Jone Dakuvula—also found themselves demoted, sacked, or marginalized.

During late 2008, hopes for some resolution to the coup-related impasse had focused on the scheduled President's Political Dialogue Forum, which the United Nations and the

Commonwealth had been invited to chair. But preliminary dialogue sessions with political parties—assisted by interlocutors Hawai'i-based Tongan academic Sitiveni Halapua and Robin Nair, a Fiji Indian who formerly worked in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade—gave little cause for optimism. Through early 2009, meetings were regularly canceled or delayed, and Bainimarama made clear that he wanted to exclude Laisenia Qarase's Soqosoqo Duavatan ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party and any others who refused to sign up to his government's People's Charter (for details, see Fraenkel 2009). Qarase's SDL, together with the National Federation Party (NFP), and former Opposition leader Mick Beddoes, as well as trade unions and civil society organizations, met under the auspices of the Democracy Movement in January, but this too was soon silenced. In March, there were attacks on the homes and vehicles of prominent government critics, including Democracy Movement President Attar Singh, *Fiji Times* editor Netani Rika, and Colonel Sakiusa Raivoce, a former army officer who is also head of Global Risks Fiji, a recruitment organization for security personnel bound for Iraq. Qarase traveled to Australia in February, where he claimed his life was at risk in Fiji, but he nevertheless returned to face trial on corruption charges in March. The deposed prime minister spent much of 2009 away from Suva on his home island. In January, he was installed as the new chief of his Mavana village on Vanuabalavu. Reports of that event were carried back to Suva by the new Tui Kubuca's traditional herald, *Daily Post* editor Mesake Koroi.

Far from embracing pressures for a restoration of democracy, the interim government was busily dismantling yet another tier of elected leadership. In January, Fiji's town and municipal councils—the country's only elected bodies for which all Fiji citizens vote together without race-based electoral rolls—were dissolved, and administrators were instead appointed to run the urban authorities. This was another blow for Fiji's political elites, still reeling as a result of the dissolution of Parliament in 2006. The councils had been important bases for the SDL, NFP, and the Fiji Labour Party (FLP). For the FLP in particular, the shift in position over 2009 was dramatic. Party leader Mahendra Chaudhry had joined the interim cabinet as finance minister in January 2007, as well as taking responsibility for sugar, national planning, and public sector restructuring. His departure in August 2008 had been due to a rift with the cabinet and the Military Council, ostensibly over a bungled attempt to impose punitive duties on the bottled mineral water industry. The subsequent break with Bainimarama had not been complete, but it sharpened in early 2009. In February, Chaudhry criticized the interim prime minister for showing “an apparent lack of concern for the poor in our society,” and in response, Bainimarama accused the FLP leader of failing “to understand the dynamics of the world's economy” (*Fiji Times*, 14 Feb 2009). Efforts to heal that breach, reportedly including an offer that Chaudhry rejoin the cabinet, proved unsuccessful (*FijiLive*, 26 Feb 2009).

Not only had FLP-run councils in Labasa, Lautoka, and Nasinu been

liquidated, but Nasinu Mayor Rajeshwar Kumar, a close ally of Chaudhry, was also being pursued by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption for alleged misappropriation of funds. In addition, the FLP's power base in the sugar industry was under threat. In February, the interim government dismantled the Sugar Commission of Fiji, Fiji Sugar Marketing Ltd, and the Sugar Research Institute, and was accused by Chaudhry of a "consequential marginalisation of the cane growers, as was the case in the colonial era" (FijiLive, 21 Feb 2009). In May, the government refused to continue to bail out the heavily subsidized South Pacific Fertilizers Ltd, a move also opposed by the FLP. Floods in January had destroyed the old Sigatoka Bridge, across which tramlines used to carry cane from Olosara Sector on the eastern side of the river to the mill at Lautoka in the west. In July, the NFP-aligned Fiji Cane Growers Association accused the government of abandoning the two hundred farmers in Olosara. Permanent Secretary for Sugar Parmesh Chand responded that spending F\$7 million to repair the bridge did not make financial sense and urged farmers to "switch to non-cane from 2010" (FijiLive, 19 Sept 2009). (F\$1.00 equals approximately US\$.52.) The thirty-eight-member Fiji Sugar Cane Grower's Council was dissolved in August. It had previously been controlled by the FLP-aligned National Farmers' Union, and the FLP responded by furiously attacking the Fiji Sugar Corporation's "local/expatriate consultants from Australia" (FLP 2009), a reference to the growing influence of two returning industry

old hands from the 1980s, Gautam Ramswarup and Rasheed Ali, both post-1987 coup émigrés. Sugar downsizing was not primarily an attack on the farmers' unions or the FLP. It was an inevitable retrenchment given the ratcheting down of European Union (EU) preferential pricing. But the consequences were the same.

Chaudhry also had other reasons for concern about the changing political situation. In February, a Times-Tebbutt opinion poll found that 37 percent of Fiji Indians favored Bainimarama as prime minister in contrast to only 15 percent in favor of Chaudhry—a dramatic change from May 2006 when Chaudhry's FLP had captured 81 percent of the Indian vote. Among indigenous Fijians, Qarase remained the favorite, with 52 percent, compared to 19 percent preferring Bainimarama (*Fiji Times*, 20 Feb 2009). Although opinion polls in Fiji are notoriously unreliable, the Times-Tebbutt poll entailed interviews with 11,256 people, an unusually large sample, and other than this, only anecdotal surveys of the public mood were available through 2009. Given the climate of intimidation and the usual urban bias in polling, the survey probably understated the backing for Qarase and the SDL at the time, but few doubted the findings about Fiji Indian support for Bainimarama's government.

Nevertheless, this was a curious reaction from a community that had protested vigorously against the coups of 1987 and 2000. Fiji Indians, who for the most part lack the safety net of owning land in rural areas, had been hit hard by steep fuel and food price rises in 2008. Acceleration in

the decline of the sugar industry over 2007–2009 lowered living standards particularly in the cane belts of northern Vanua Levu and western Viti Levu, and strengthened the longer-run exodus toward the towns. Bitter hatred of the Qarase government had prompted initial sympathies for the December 2006 coup, but would this endure as the economy faltered, and as the prices of basic foodstuffs soared? Despite the economic deterioration, the signs were that Indian backing for the interim government remained strong. By year's end, even the resolutely anti-coup NFP saw its Fiji Cane Growers Association making overtures to Bainimarama (FBC, 16 Feb 2010). Chaudhry had initially encouraged support for the regime on the part of Fiji Indians, and although he was now out of the government, other prominent Indians like Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and Colonel Mohammed Aziz were in key positions in the new order. Bainimarama spoke regularly of racial equality, and his relentless assault on Qarase, as well as on the Methodist Church leaders and Fijian chiefs allied with the SDL, captured the sympathy of those who had long felt themselves to be the victims of Fijian ethno-nationalism. As University of the South Pacific (USP) economist Wadan Narsey remarked in despair at the prevailing mood in his community, "To obtain the support of Indian people in this country (and abroad), all you need to do is chant the mantra of racial equality" (*Fiji Times*, 31 Jan 2009).

Bainimarama's commitment to racial equality had come late in his career, although many retrospectively emphasized the importance of his schooling at the multiracial Marist

Brothers School in Suva. His actions after the 2000 coup, and in particular his seizure of executive authority and abrogation of the constitution on 29 May 2000, had at the time been vigorously condemned by Fiji Indian commentators, including the FLP leadership. The platform of his thirty-seven-day administration in 2000 had been about uplifting the indigenous Fijians, not racial equality. His espousal of the cause of the Fiji Indians had matured during battles against the Qarase government, particularly over the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill, which many believed was aimed at granting amnesty to the 2000 coup instigators. Bainimarama nevertheless remained first and foremost a military man, in charge of an army that was 99 percent composed of ethnic Fijians. Little effort was made to alter this even after the 2006 coup, as could be seen from the overwhelmingly indigenous names of new recruits listed for training exercises as advertised in the national newspapers over 2007–2009. In substance, Bainimarama's core message remained similar to that in 2000: It was about pulling Fijians up by the bootstraps into modernity, using repression if necessary. Allusions to a cannibalistic past and other derogatory references to Fijian backwardness were used to justify the case for military-guided modernization (see, eg, *SkyNewsAustralia* 2009; see also Fraenkel 2007, 435). The November 2000 mutiny, which involved an attempt on Bainimarama's life, had encouraged a strain of fanaticism in the commander, and determination not to be swayed from his purpose was no doubt reinforced by the likely dire personal consequences of failure.

Not all of Bainimarama's loyal lieutenants shared this perspective. In February at the Nasova Police Academy, Police Commissioner Esala Teleni criticized senior Fiji Indian officers for disloyalty after some protested to the media about internal religious pressures, including a requirement to attend prayer sessions as part of the commissioner's "Christian Crusade" against crime. At a meeting secretly filmed by Fiji TV, Commodore Teleni berated the mostly Hindu and Muslim Indian officers saying "Kemudou tamata liu muri (You people are backstabbers). I don't know what's wrong with you people" (Fiji TV, 17 Feb 2009; FijiLive, 18 Feb 2009). Bainimarama came to the defense of his fellow naval officer, saying, "I would do the same thing," and emphasizing the importance of discipline in the security forces: "Commissioner Teleni is not a racist, he is only doing his job" (FijiLive, 18 Feb 2009). In a letter to the *Fiji Times*, former Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi pointed out that this was vilification of members of a specific ethnic group and that "racism by another name does not make it less so" (*Fiji Times*, 25 Feb 2009). In March at Valelevu, Commodore Teleni, strutting on the stage in the manner of an evangelist preacher, reiterated his warning to disloyal officers and threatened divine retribution (Fiji TV, 21 March 2009). Police officers were required to attend Christian crusade events organized by Teleni's brother Atu Vulaono's New Methodist Church. Through mid-2009, Vulaono's police force-funded New Methodists held frequent "Souls to Jesus" rallies across Suva, in Sukuna Park, at the FMF Dome, and at

the National Stadium (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 Nov 2009), while the Qarase-aligned mainstream Methodist Church had meeting permits refused. The "Christian Crusade" within the police force, and Vulaono's New Methodist road show, only abated after protests from prominent Catholic regime supporters led Bainimarama to quash the new cult.

The legality of rule by presidential decree, and thus of Bainimarama's government, had been upheld by a decision of Fiji's High Court in October 2008, but an appeal in the *Qarase v Bainimarama* case was inevitable. Judicial deliberation in this case was constrained by the precedent set after the 2000 coup, when the Court of Appeal ruled in the Chandrika Prasad case that the 1997 constitution was still intact and that the then postcoup interim government had no legal standing. To avoid that precedent, Chief Justice Anthony Gates, together with Justices Davendra Pathik and John Byrne, ruled in October 2008 that the postcoup actions of President Ratu Josefa Iloilo entailed a legal exercise of "prerogative powers," which, although not explicit in the 1997 constitution, had been inherited by all former colonies from the British Crown (FJHC 2008). This was a verdict condemned by most legal scholars (see Williams and others 2008). The October 2008 judgment was nevertheless vigorously upheld as the basis of the legal order in Fiji. In January, postcoup appointee Justice Thomas Hickie—who quite literally sang the praises of the 2008 Fiji judgments on national television in November (Fiji TV, 25 Nov 2008)—convicted the *Fiji Times* of "contempt of court"

for publishing a letter critical of that judgment. Although no verdict was recorded against *Fiji Times* publisher Rex Gardner, he subsequently became the third Australian newspaper publisher to be deported since the 2006 coup.

In the Court of Appeal judgment issued on 9 April, the October 2008 decision was overturned. Justices Ian Lloyd, Randall Powell SC, and Francis Maxwell Douglas QC ruled that presidential powers were closely circumscribed by the 1997 constitution. The dismissal of Qarase's government and the appointment of Bainimarama as prime minister were pronounced illegal. It was declared that a neutral prime minister should be appointed in a caretaker role to advise a constitutional dissolution of parliament ahead of fresh elections (FJCA 2009). With their judgment released and a government appeal for a stay order refused, Justices Lloyd, Powell, and Douglas left the country, enabling Gates and other Fiji resident judges to avoid the stain of having ruled the interim government illegal. Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum criticized the court for generating a "vacuum" (FijiLive, 9 April 2009). Bainimarama told Auckland-based Radio Tarana that he was going back to barracks (*Fiji Times*, 11 April 2009). This was, as Australian National University Professor Brij V Lal put it, a "cruel hoax" (Lal 2009), one scripted to reinforce the fallacy of presidential control.

The next day, President Iloilo—whose office remained firmly under military control—announced that he was abrogating the 1997 constitution, that all judicial appointments had been revoked, and that he was declaring

himself head of state. The Fiji Constitution Amendment Act 1997 Revocation Decree 2009 stated: "I hereby decree that all Decrees promulgated under my hand and seal shall be regarded as law and shall be observed and enforced." Elections would not be held until September 2014, giving five years to put in place the necessary reforms "to hold true democratic and parliamentary elections." Another day later, Bainimarama and his cabinet were all reappointed. Officers from the military-controlled Ministry of Information were sent on a nightly basis into the newsrooms of the local media organizations, several foreign journalists were expelled, and the signals from Radio Australia were jammed in an effort to avoid "negative publicity." The Fiji dollar was devalued by 20 percent, and longstanding Reserve Bank Governor Savenaca Narube was sacked. So too was Director of Public Prosecutions Josaia Naigalevu and, as a result of regime infighting, Ombudsman Shaista Shameem. Bainimarama's decision, at the initial press conference after the abrogation of the constitution, to appear alongside his fellow naval officers, Esala Teleni and Viliame Naupoto, rather than the top-ranking army officers, suggested some fear of resistance. Blog sites speculated about the absence of Colonel Pita Driti, the Fiji Land Force commander, and Ratu Tevita Uluilakeba, the head of the key Third Infantry Regiment (3RFI) who is also the youngest son of former President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and politically well placed as chairman of the Lau Provincial Council.

Protest within Fiji was negligible, as it had been after the October

2008 High Court decision. A few courageous barristers turned up to demonstrate outside courts in Suva and Lautoka when they reopened after the Easter break, and Chaudhry condemned Bainimarama's actions as "autocratic and dictatorial" (*The Australian*, 27 April 2009). Schisms within the military remained concealed or were healed by reward and self-interest. On 24 April, Colonel Pita Driti together with close Bainimarama confidante Colonel Mohammed Aziz were publicly rewarded with medals by President Iloilo. In June, Driti said that the Military Council was 100 percent behind Bainimarama and denied rumors of a split. Soon after the destruction of Fiji's legal order, soldiers convicted for the killings of Nimilote Verebasaga and Sakiusa Rabaka were released on "compulsory supervision orders," echoing the much-criticized actions of the Qarase government in its treatment of chiefs convicted for their part in the 2000 coup. Although those actions deeply damaged Bainimarama's credibility, they also sent a clear message to the military rank and file that they would be protected should they shed blood to protect the regime. During 2009, military officers received substantial pay increases as well as additional back pay. By midyear, there were around sixty officers located in senior civil service positions, and all four divisional commissioners were military men. All this was a far cry from Bainimarama's initial postcoup claims that no military officer would benefit from the December 2006 takeover.

Over 2008, the initial justification of the December 2006 coup as a "clean-up campaign" against cor-

ruption faded in prominence, partly due to the lack of success of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption in securing prosecutions and partly because of serious allegations emerging against the interim government itself. In March 2009, Auditor General Eroni Vatuloka completed a report into the F\$184,740 received by the commander in "back pay" for 698 days of leave allegedly not taken since 1978, and then promptly resigned. The Web site of his office remained stalled at the year 2006, the reports for which were shown as "produced but not yet tabled in parliament." The pursuit of prominent individuals for corruption, including deposed Prime Minister Qarase and sacked Airports Fiji Chief Executive Sakiusa Tuisolia, was transparently linked to personal and political vendettas, while Fijian villages that acquiesced under the new order were rewarded with development projects.

During 2008, the emphasis had instead been on electoral reform, a perspective encouraged by the deliberations of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (NCBBF). Early elections were unwise, it had been argued, because the 1997 constitution's race-based electoral rolls were responsible for ethnic polarization in postindependence Fiji. Time was needed for Bainimarama to convince Fiji's politicians to sign up to a new electoral system, a central focus of the political parties dialogue, and the scheduled President's Political Dialogue Forum. This was a vision embraced by many of Bainimarama's sympathizers, both within Fiji and even more so overseas. While it seemed at least plausible before the

April abrogation, it made no sense afterward, when nothing stopped immediate electoral reform by presidential decree. After 10 April, anyway, regime spokesman Neumi Leweni flatly rejected any resumption of dialogue. In July, Bainimarama told SBS Dateline that an election was out of the question because Qarase “would win it and where would that take us?” (SBS Dateline, 26 July 2009). Henceforth, electoral reform issues would be downplayed. The justification for the long delay until 2014 before elections was never publicly made explicit, but it became obvious that Bainimarama hoped that, with time, Fijian opinion would eventually swing in his favor.

On 1 July, Bainimarama released a “Strategic Policy Framework,” written by NCBBF Technical Director John Samy, who again traveled to Fiji from his New Zealand home. This outlined plans for consultations on a new constitution to commence only in 2012, and for the new legal framework to be in place by 2013, a year ahead of the intended election deadline. Although hostility to “ethnic based voting” was still mentioned, the emphasis was now firmly on the economy and “pro-growth and pro-poor” initiatives. This was music to the ears of Bainimarama’s left-wing supporters, who had long urged a focus on alleviating the plight of urban squatters and combating “neo-liberalism.” In January, the regime’s orientation had been different. Then, Bainimarama had postponed scheduled minimum wage increases across nine industries and rescinded a planned 10 percent decrease in bus fares (which was to reverse an earlier increase triggered by the global fuel price hikes of 2008).

The furious Wages Council chairman, Catholic priest Father Kevin Barr, accused the interim prime minister of caving in to business interests and gave a press conference from the labor ministry on national television provocatively accompanied by government critic, USP Professor Wadan Narsey. Bainimarama assured his critics that, although postponed, the minimum wage increases would occur in July. A few days later, with the Fiji TV cameras rolling, he walked together with Father Barr through Suva’s notorious Jittu estate squatter settlement to demonstrate government concern with issues of urban poverty.

In July, as promised, the interim government agreed to the minimum wage increases across nine industries. Other moves were also made to strengthen the link with the leftist development lobby. In March, the China Railway First Company signed a F\$70 million contract to build low-cost housing units in Tacirua, Rawai, and Raiwaqa on the outskirts of Suva. This was intended as part of a F\$260 million soft loan being sought from the Export-Import Bank of China at 2 percent interest per annum. Three hundred Chinese contractors were at work building a hydroelectric dam in remote Nadarivatu, and others were building a new bridge at Naqali to cross the flood-prone Waidina River in Naitasiri. In October, Barr’s Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy produced a survey indicating that school attendance was falling because poor families could not afford bus fares. Bainimarama responded by abolishing the fares, generating vigorous applause from radical civil society activists (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30

Nov 2009). But would this be only another temporary marriage of convenience, as had been that with the electoral reformists and the People's Charter lobbyists? After all, the common denominator in these various favored alliances were that they all justified the interim government's retention of political power and the delay of fresh elections while providing temporary jobs for a few hired scriptwriters.

With the politicians, chiefs, and public sector unions defeated, many indigenous Fijians looked to the Methodist Church for leadership in the struggle against Bainimarama. In June, Methodist Church President Ame Tugaue and General Secretary Tuikilakila Waqairatu met with Bainimarama and were told that the Methodist annual conference was to be canceled unless the veteran fire-brand ethno-nationalist, the Reverend Manasa Lasaro, and the Reverend Tomasi Kanailagi were expelled (*Fiji Sun*, 9 June 2009). The conference, scheduled for August at Lomanikoro in Rewa, was to be hosted by deposed education minister and Rewa high chief Ro Teimumu Kepa. This was an obvious potential focal point for indigenous resistance: Military intelligence identified the risk entailed by allowing an event that even under normal circumstances would draw large numbers of indigenous Fijians together. Public Emergency Regulations, which had been renewed monthly since the April crisis, were the "only way to control instability which may give rise to violent situations," said Defence Minister Ratu Epeli Ganilau (*FijiLive*, 23 June 2009). In July, Ro Teimumu released an open letter on the Internet, saying that the annual Methodist

conference would go ahead in defiance of the regime (*Raw Fiji News*, 21 July 2009). Government spokesman Neumi Leweni described this as a "form of incitement" (*FijiLive*, 22 July 2009). Ro Teimumu and eight Methodist leaders were taken into military custody and then charged with breaching the emergency regulations. Ro Teimumu's daughter, together with Bau Chief Adi Litia Cakobau, placed a fireside video on YouTube denouncing the arrest (Cakobau 2009). Ro Teimumu and the churchmen were released on bail but kept under close scrutiny. Resistance soon petered out. The triumphant Bainimarama declared that the church's annual convention would not be held until 2014.

With the Methodists now also humbled, many in Fiji passively acquiesced under the new order, hoping for better times. Overseas, defiance remained easier. The émigré-run Fiji Democracy Movement organized demonstrations in Sydney and Canberra that were attended almost exclusively by indigenous Fijian families. At the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Cairns in August, Niue Prime Minister Toke Talagi shocked even Australian and New Zealand diplomats by calling on Fijians to "rise up to challenge the undemocratic rule of the military regime," seeming to urge a violent confrontation: "If 500,000 Fijians take to the streets Frank Bainimarama can't shoot them all" (*The Australian*, 6 Aug 2009). Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi had also called on Fijians to "wake up and reclaim your Government" earlier in 2009, leading Bainimarama to respond that such comments were "un-Pacific" (*FijiLive*, 26 Feb 2009).

Other Pacific leaders were more sympathetic to Fiji's interim prime minister, including Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare and Vanuatu's Edward Natapei, who offered to broker talks under the auspices of the Melanesian Spearhead Group. The small island states to Fiji's north, including Tuvalu and Kiribati, were worried that repercussions of Forum defiance of Bainimarama's government might lead to a severing of their air links, through Fiji, to the outside world. Lobbying by Canberra and Wellington ensured that the Pacific Islands Forum official statements remained resolutely in favor of the suspension of Fiji, but the position of the PIF Secretariat located in Suva was obviously threatened. Qarase and Chaudhry had been successfully prevailed upon to join forces in August to write a joint letter to the Cairns meeting rejecting the three-year delay before elections and condemning the Bainimarama regime for "setting itself up as the sole arbiter of what is good for Fiji" (Qarase and Chaudhry 2009). Yet in truth, the anti-interim government politicians remained deeply divided, and even great adversity had not truly healed the schisms of bygone years.

The silencing of domestic criticism of Fiji's interim regime over the second half of 2009 also spurred Bainimarama's foreign sympathizers to become more vocal, now less afraid that their interpretations might be contested from within Fiji. The Vanuatu-based Institute of Public Policy called Bainimarama a "circuit breaker" to break "endemic racism," rid Fiji of corruption, and destroy the pernicious influences of the Great Council of Chiefs

(GCC) and the Methodist Church. The institute urged an international accommodation with "the reality" and criticized those "persistently demonising the Commodore" (Pacific Institute of Public Policy 2009). Such a generous interpretation took Bainimarama at his word and even exaggerated the commodore's objectives. Bainimarama, wrongly described as "Catholic," might have defied the leaders of the Methodist Church and the Great Council of Chiefs, but it was not clear whether he sought to destroy or to capture and reshape those institutions. Even if the case was fairly made for combating corruption and eliminating racial polarization, it was far-fetched to think that military dictatorship was the means for accomplishing these goals. Other overseas think tanks were also bewildered by Bainimarama but wanted to offer some way out of the impasse. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Anthony Bergin absurdly recommended that Britain's Prince Andrew, as a fellow white-suited naval officer, would be an ideal mediator to engage in discussions with Bainimarama (*The Australian*, 8 May 2009).

Before the United Nations General Assembly in September, Bainimarama condemned the "old elites," whom he blamed for generating earlier coups and impeding reform. He did not mention that prominent backers of the 1987 coup, including Ratu Inoke Kubuabola and Filipe Bole, were in his own cabinet. His assault on the "old elites" had been selective and pragmatic: powerful ministerial portfolios were also held by prominent eastern chiefs, such as Ratu Epeli Ganilau and Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, both sons-in-

law of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji's former president and 1970–1987 prime minister. The attack on the chiefs had been aimed at destroying the influence of the paramount chiefs who were firm allies of Qarase, particularly Roko Tui Dreketi Ro Teimumu Kepa (Rewa-Burebasaga) and Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu (Cakaudrove), but Bainimarama nevertheless remained close to allied chiefs—for example, in his home village of Kiuva and in the old Matanitu (kingdom) of Verata. His own behavior and demeanor, as well as his treatment during military kava ceremonies, was increasingly vakaturaga (in the manner of high chiefs).

Had the Great Council of Chiefs truly been abolished, or would it ultimately be reconstituted? In August, Bainimarama was adamant that “there is no Great Council of Chiefs,” but he was noncommittal about whether such a body might later be resurrected (FijiLive, 11 Aug 2009). According to the 2008 GCC decree, a new look fifty-two-member council had been envisaged comprising only apolitical chiefs who had been “traditionally installed,” suggesting a more puritanical definition of “chief” than existing practice (under which many titles remain vacant and many chiefs uninstalled). Bainimarama had also backtracked on proposals to downgrade the Ministry of Fijian Affairs to a department in 2007. Over 2007–2008, he had been angered by the GCC refusal to endorse Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as vice president—or effectively president in waiting, given the age and infirmity of eighty-nine-year-old Ratu Josefa Iloilo. Nailatikau had himself taken control of that ministry in

October 2008, now combined under the rubric of the Ministry of Provincial Development, Indigenous and Multi-Ethnic Affairs. In late 2008, he had convened an initial meeting of the Bose ni Turaga (council of lower-level chiefs), with the objective of a bottom-upward capturing of the authority of the Great Council of Chiefs. While under the 1997 constitution this had been an important maneuver: the Great Council of Chiefs was constitutionally the appointing authority for the president and vice president. In the wake of the abrogation of the constitution, that route was no longer necessary, and no effort was made to reconvene the Bose ni Turaga in 2009. A week after the constitution's abrogation, Ratu Epeli became vice president by decree. Ratu Josefa Iloilo was retired on 30 July, paving the way for Nailatikau to assume the top job. The delay before that appointment, which only occurred three months later on 5 November, suggested some nervousness on the part of Bainimarama about handing over executive authority. In the intervening period, there were rumors that Bainimarama was toying with taking the presidency for himself.

If the propaganda was to be believed, then, the elegant new F\$30 million Vale ni Bose Levu Vakaturaga complex situated next to Government House on the Suva foreshore was a huge white elephant. The project, undertaken by Raghwan Construction Ltd, had started under Qarase, but what purpose was it now to serve? Military spokesman Neumi Leweni said that the new building would be officially titled “Vale ni Bose” (“House of Meetings”) without the

reference to “Vakaturaga” (“Great Chiefs”). A hundred guests were invited to attend the grand September opening ceremony and watch President Iloilo perform his last official duty. Representing the government were Ratu Epeli Ganilau, as acting prime minister, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, Filipe Bole, and Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum. The ceremony was boycotted by most of the Qarase-aligned chiefs, but chiefs from Macuata, Sabeto, Bua, and Ba were present, as was the Rewa Vunivalu Ro Epeli Mataitini, and, rather oddly, Naitasiri chief Ratu Inoke Takiveikata, who was soon to be imprisoned for alleged involvement in a 2007 plot to assassinate Bainimarama (FijiLive, 26 Sept 2009). The interim prime minister also did not attend the October launch by PNG Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare of Deryck Scarr’s biography *Tuimacilai: A Life of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara*, although the daughters of Ratu Mara and his sons-in-law Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and Ganilau were present, as was Mara’s son 3RFI Commander Ratu Tevita Uluilakeba. Ambivalence toward the incorporated element of the chiefly order was obvious, but there was also no sign of eagerness to cut the eastern chiefs adrift.

The economy fared poorly over 2009. Unlike the coups of 1987 and 2000, which resulted in sharp downturns followed by rapid recoveries, the 2006 coup generated a double-dip recession. The economy contracted by 6.6 percent in 2007, remained just about flat (0.2 percent) in 2008, and fell again by 2.5 percent in 2009. Long protected under the European Union Lomé and then Cotonou arrangements, preferential prices for Fiji

sugar were being gradually reduced to enable EU compliance with World Trading Organization rules. On 1 October, the EU price for Fiji sugar was cut by a further 22 percent, bringing to 36 percent the total fall since 2006. That would have happened even without the coup, but scheduled EU grant assistance for adjustment to the new pricing regime was canceled as a result of the illegal overthrow of Qarase’s government and the lack of agreement on a road map to elections. The Fiji Sugar Corporation produced 167,611 metric tonnes of sugar in 2009, well below the 250,000–300,000 tonnes scheduled to be delivered to Tate & Lyle annually. Exports fell for the third successive year and stood at about half the average level a decade previously. The Fiji Sugar Corporation annual report for 2009 declared an after tax loss of F\$36.8 million in the year ending 31 May. The company was unable to make repayments on a F\$86 million loan from EXIM Bank of India for purchasing materials for mill restructuring. Just prior to the last shipment preceding the 1 October price fall, both of the main Indian farmers’ unions reported military harassment of cane-cutters for burning cane, the latter being a widespread practice that eases cutting but lowers sugar output.

Like sugar, Fiji’s garment industry also faced a long-running decline that was accentuated by the postcoup crisis: a thousand jobs were lost over the year to June 2009, equivalent to roughly one-fifth of the workforce (*Fiji Sun*, 1 Jan 2009). Gold production had resumed at Vatukoula on Viti Levu in early 2008, although with a workforce of 750, about half the

number employed before the closure in late 2006. Output fell during the first nine months of 2009, but tracked upward in the final months of the year. Bottled mineral water, which accounted for 11.4 percent of Fiji's exports over 2006–2008, was badly hit by the slowdown in American markets in 2009. Criticism of manufacturers Natural Waters of Fiji Ltd in the September/October 2009 issue of the US magazine *Mother Jones* for putting “lipstick on a junta” and for having a heavy carbon footprint damaged the company's credibility. Fish exports performed strongly over the year, and Levuka's Pacific Fishing Company cannery benefited from the closure of one of the American Samoan canneries. Yet the standout industry in 2009 was clearly tourism. Visitor arrivals had fallen after the December 2006 coup but recovered strongly in late 2007 and 2008, although discounting by the major resorts subdued earnings. A further trough in early 2009, witnessed across the Pacific Islands, was due to the impact of the global recession. Arrivals from Australia and New Zealand recovered strongly from mid-2009, but then dipped later in the year with the coming of the low season. Investment in tourism and elsewhere remained at rock bottom in Fiji: An effort to auction off the aborted Momi Bay Resort development failed in August, and in March, Fijian Holdings Ltd failed to raise the necessary finance for its planned buyout of British Petroleum South West Pacific. Several companies engaged in the construction of villas and resorts on Denarau Island, close to the Nadi International Airport, were in major trouble, and the Hil-

ton extension project had gone into receivership.

Official figures suggested that, in February, Fiji's reserves had fallen to F\$672.2 million, equivalent to 2.7 months of imports, but, in an interview with SkyNewsAustralia in May, Bainimarama acknowledged that the true figure had been “below 1.8 months” of imports. The devaluation in April eased pressure on the reserves, but inflation predictably increased as the local cost of imported goods rose. Reserves were also boosted by an International Monetary Fund (IMF) allocation of F\$188 million in special drawing rights to Fiji, part of a broader global rollout of assistance in response to the international financial crisis and by restrictions on bank repatriation of profits. However, devaluation also raised the costs of servicing Fiji's US\$150 million five-year bond, which has a 7 percent per annum interest rate and falls due in 2011. IMF Article IV consultations in November concluded by commending the government “for their efforts to limit the overall deficit in 2009 to the budgeted level of 3¼ percent of GDP. This is being achieved by containing expenditure in the face of an unexpected 10 percent fall in revenue” (IMF 2009). However, the IMF press release also indicated concern that public sector debt was running at over 50 percent of gross domestic product, and criticized continued government reliance on borrowing from the Fiji National Provident Fund, Fiji's main pension provider. The restraint in spending had been assisted by the compulsory retirement of 2,300 civil servants as a result of the reduction in the retirement age from 60 to 55.

In the decree affecting that reduction, two senior civil servants were expressly excluded—Bainimarama and Police Commissioner Esala Teleni. On 27 April, Commodore Bainimarama turned 55, and was serenaded by a military brass band that turned up to play “Happy Birthday” outside his house at 5 o’clock in the morning.

In a consultative forum on the 2010 budget in September, Bainimarama told the audience “we’re going to leapfrog” toward economic growth, pursuing objectives of “modernising Fiji, bringing it into prosperity and out of poverty.” “I’m here for power,” he said, “but power so we can do the things the right way. I am not here to abuse power. I am not here to abuse the funds, nor here to abuse the authority that I have. If it’s done, it’s because there is a reason for it. We want to keep people in line,” he explained, “We need to change people if they don’t think the way we want them to think” (FijiLive, 17 Sept 2009). The Fiji Employers’ Federation and Chamber of Commerce pushed for a protectionist budget (FijiLive, 19 Sept 2009), but in his 2010 budget address in November, Bainimarama said it was rather the IMF advice that “corresponds with the reformist agenda of my government” (Bainimarama 2009). The address outlined plans to double gross domestic product by 2020, eliminate the current account deficit, and increase tourist arrivals to 6 million, ten times the number entering Fiji in 2008. Standard & Poor’s revised its “negative” rating for Fiji to “stable” in December.

There was no improvement in Fiji’s relations with Australia, New Zealand, or the Commonwealth over

2009. Fiji was suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum in May and exclusion from the Councils of the Commonwealth was ratcheted up to full suspension in September 2009. In despair, the UN Department of Political Affairs gave up efforts to mediate after Bainimarama’s exclusion of key political parties from talks on 9 April. In November, the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Trinidad and Tobago resolved that Fiji would not participate in the Commonwealth Games scheduled for India in October 2010. Despite Fiji’s suspension, former New Zealand Governor-General Sir Paul Reeves arrived in Fiji as Commonwealth Envoy in September, but he was unable to persuade Bainimarama to resume dialogue with the politicians or to commit to early elections. Instead, Bainimarama harangued Reeves to sign on to the government’s reform program and refused to allow him to meet political leaders opposed to the regime. Continued usage of Fiji soldiers on UN peacekeeping missions was criticized by Australia and New Zealand, with Australia’s Kevin Rudd urging a “progressive replacement of Fijian troops” (*The Australian*, 7 Sept 2009). At a New York press conference on 21 May, UN Office of Peacekeeping chief Alain Le Roy responded off the cuff to a query: “Yes, we are trying [to replace them] but so far there is no pledges” [*sic*], and conceded that Fijians in Iraq “will be very difficult to replace” (ABC Pacific Beat 2009a). In November, the United Nations refused to accept Colonel Pita Driti as new head of peacekeeping operations in Iraq because of “allegations of serious human rights violations” (UN 2010).

Australian and New Zealand travel bans targeting members of the interim government and military officers, as well as their families and government appointees, were much resented in Fiji, although some critics urged their retention to prevent the regime from consolidating its influence. Hostility to the travel bans gave Bainimarama and Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum a tool with which to consolidate domestic support. In early November, a diplomatic crisis was triggered by a press conference organized by Chief Justice Anthony Gates to protest against allegedly heavy-handed Australian and New Zealand travel bans (Gates 2009). Gates had waited until six weeks after the abrogation before signing on again as chief justice, at which point he emphasized the need for “curbing excesses” after coups and “bringing the country and its institutions back to normality” (FijiLive, 23 May 2009). His November press conference was sparked by two incidents. First, Sri Lankan judges intending to travel to Fiji to take up positions on the bench had been telephoned by an Australian consular official in Colombo to warn them that taking up such appointments would render them unable to travel to Australia. Second, family court judge Anjala Wati had been refused a visa by the New Zealand High Commission to take her son to Auckland for urgent medical treatment. Although the visa was subsequently granted, Gates wrote to the commander alleging that such case-by-case exemptions entailed foreign interference with the independence of the judiciary and asked, “Can the Executive allow such interference to continue?” (ABC

Pacific Beat 2009b). The once highly respected judge was clearly urging the commander to lash out against his opponents. On 3 November, Australian High Commissioner James Batley and New Zealand Acting High Commissioner Tod Cleaver were expelled, and Fiji’s Acting High Commissioner in Canberra Kamlesh Arya was hastily withdrawn in an effort to preempt the inevitable tit-for-tat retaliatory expulsion. Cleaver became the third New Zealand head of mission to be expelled from Fiji. Several days later, Labasa-born Fiji historian Brij V Lal—one of the architects of the 1997 constitution—was also ordered out of the country.

Fiji’s coups occur in two stanzas because the full repercussions of the initial overthrow of government are not immediately obvious to the perpetrators. The exception here was 2000, when the instigators were not the same as the constitution’s abrogators, but that event only confirmed another rule in Fiji politics, namely, that it is the military that decides the outcome of coups—which is why Sitiveni Rabuka succeeded in 1987, why George Speight failed in 2000, and why Frank Bainimarama remained in power in 2009. Unlike 1987 when the Republic of Fiji Military Forces “neglected to form any coalition with a civilian partner” (Scobell 1994, 197), a broad-ranging coalition opposed to Qarase’s government had been assembled prior to the 2006 coup, one particularly focused on opposition to the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill. This eased postcoup military consolidation of political power, even if former allies subsequently drifted away. In December 2006, Bainimarama had claimed

to be acting in accordance with the constitution and the “doctrine of necessity.” It was not a coup at all, he had said, but a temporary “clean up.” Since then, the coup instigators’ core themes had morphed from anticorruption to electoral reform to poverty alleviation, and the fantasy that military control masquerading as rule by presidential decree might be found constituent with the 1997 constitution had been exposed as a sham. April 2009 proved the turning point, but it was still unclear where Fiji was heading. Ironically, the suspension of talks on the new constitution until 2012 took the pressure off Fiji’s new rulers in the sense that they no longer felt much need to explain themselves. If events went according to plan, 2010 looked set to be a year of deafening silence.

JON FRAENKEL

References

ABC Pacific Beat.

2009a. Former Fiji Army Chief Says Military Too Large. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 26 June. <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacbeat/stories/200906/s2609011.htm>

2009b. Leaked Documents Reveal Role of Fiji Chief Justice in Expulsions. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 10 November. <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacbeat/stories/200911/s2738173.htm>

Al Jazeera. 2009. 101 East—Fiji: Dictating Democracy 30 July 09. Two-part interview with Commodore Frank Bainimarama. Available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVVgSkA8AV0&feature=channel>

Amnesty International. 2009. *Fiji: Paradise Lost: A Tale of Ongoing Human Rights Violations April–July 2009*. 7 September. London: Amnesty International. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA18/002/2009/en/0024be13-bdd1-47d2-875a-863fff41f978/asa180022009en.pdf>.

The Australian. Daily newspaper, Sydney. Online at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/>

Bainimarama, Josaia Voreqe [Frank]. 2009. Strengthening the Foundations of Economic Growth and Prosperity. Republic of Fiji 2010 Budget Address. Novotel Lami, 27 November. http://www.mfn.gov.fj/Documents/2010_Budget_Address.pdf

Cakobau, Adi Litia. 2009. Democracy for Fiji: The Detainment of Ro Teimumu Kepa. Fireside video on YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9hfbYnq694>

FBC, Fiji Broadcasting Corporation. National Radio Service. <http://www.radiofiji.com.fj/>

Fiji Constitution Amendment Act 1997 Revocation Decree 2009. Available on Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute Web site: http://www.pacii.org/fj/promu/promu_dec/fcaa1997rd2009444/

FijiLive. Online news service. <http://www.fijilive.com/>

Fiji Sun. Daily newspaper, Suva. Online at <http://www.sun.com.fj/>

Fiji Times. Daily newspaper, Suva. Online at <http://www.fijitimes.com/>

Fiji TV. National television service. Suva. <http://www.fijitv.com.fj>

FJCA, Fiji Court of Appeal. 2009. *Qarase v Bainimarama* [2009] FJCA 9; ABU 0077.2008s. 9 April. Available on Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute Web site: <http://www.pacii.org/fj/cases/FJCA/2009/9.html>

- FJHC, Fiji High Court. 2008. *Qarase v Bainimarama* [2008] FJHC 241; HBC 60.2007s; HBC 398.2007s. 9 October. Available on Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute Web site: <http://www.pacii.org/fj/cases/FJHC/2008/241.html>
- FLP, Fiji Labour Party. 2009. Government and FSC Playing Politics with Farmers. 24 August. <http://www.flp.org.fj/n090824b.htm>
- Fraenkel, Jon. 2007. The Fiji Coup of December 2006: Who, What, Where and Why? In *From Election to Coup in Fiji: The 2006 Campaign and Its Aftermath*, edited by Jon Fraenkel and Stewart Firth, 420–449. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies and Asia-Pacific Press. <http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/addendum.pdf>
- . 2009. Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2008: Fiji. *The Contemporary Pacific* 21:337–352.
- Gates, Anthony. 2009. Statement by the Chief Justice of Fiji upon the travel bans imposed by Australia and New Zealand on the Judiciary and Magistracy of Fiji. 1 November. Ministry of Information, Fiji Government Online Portal. http://www.fiji.gov.fj/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&cid=604:statement-by-the-chief-justice-of-fiji-upon-the-travel-bans-imposed-by-australia-and-new-zealand-on-the-judiciary-and-magistracy-of-fiji&catid=50:speeches&Itemid=168
- IBA, International Bar Association. 2009. Dire Straits: A Report on the Rule of Law in Fiji. IBA Human Rights Institute report. 3 March. <http://www.ibanet.org/Search/Default.aspx?q=Dire%20Straits>
- IMF, International Monetary Fund. 2009. Statement of an IMF Staff Mission at the Conclusion of the Article IV Discussions with Fiji. Press Release 09/427, 23 November. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2009/pr09427.htm>
- Lal, Brij V. 2009. Fiji: The Cruel Hoax. Pacific Islands Report, 14 April. <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2009/April/04-14-com.htm>
- Mother Jones*. 2009. Fiji Water: Spin the Bottle. September/October. <http://motherjones.com/politics/2009/09/fiji-spin-bottle>
- Pacific Institute of Public Policy. 2009. Lending Fiji a Hand: The Need for International Engagement and a National Dialogue. Briefing 09, July. <http://www.pacificpolicy.org>
- Post Courier*. 2009. Viewpoints: Moresby Summit Sets Fiji Target. 28 January. <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/>
- Qarase, Laisenia, and Mahendra Pal Chaudhry. 2009. Joint Statement on Fiji by the Leaders of the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua Party and the Fiji Labour Party. Fortieth Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting, Cairns, Australia, 5–6 August. Available on <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/documents.php>
- Raw Fiji News. Internet blog. <http://rawfijinews.wordpress.com/>
- SBS Dateline. 2009. Perfectly Frank. Mark Davis Interview with Frank Bainimarama. Special Broadcasting Service, Australia, 26 July. <http://www.sbs.com.au/datetime/story/watch/id/600166n/Perfectly-Frank>
- Scarr, Deryck. 2008. *Tuimacilai: A Life of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara*. Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing.
- Scobell, Andrew. 1994. Politics, Professionalism, and Peacekeeping: An Analysis of the 1987 Military Coup in Fiji. *Comparative Politics* 26 (2): 187–201.
- SkyNewsAustralia. 2009. Fiji's Frank Bainimarama. Three-part interview with Graham Davis. 2 May. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwN7zgNUV7Y>
- Sydney Morning Herald*. Daily newspaper. Online at <http://www.smh.com.au/>
- UN, United Nations. 2010. Daily Press Briefing by the Offices of the Spokesperson

for the Secretary-General and the Spokesperson for the General Assembly President. 19 February. <http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs//2010/db100219.doc.htm>

Williams, George, Graham Leung, Anthony J Regan, and Jon Fraenkel. 2008. *Courts and Coups in Fiji: The 2008 High Court Judgment in *Qarase v Bainimarama*. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2008/10*. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University. http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/melanesia/discussion_papers/08_10_williams.pdf

NEW CALEDONIA

This year was a potential turning point in the decolonization of New Caledonia. The Noumea Accord of 1998 said that the country could hold a referendum on independence in 2014, and the provincial elections of May 2009 produced a Congress empowered to call for that referendum. The country already has a “double” federal relationship with France, as its three provinces have some autonomy from the territory, which in turn continues to receive more self-governing powers from Paris. France itself is integrated into the European Union, so the status of New Caledonia in some ways resembles that of a chartered town in the old medieval European hierarchy. Since 1986, the United Nations Decolonization Committee has regarded New Caledonia as a non-self-governing territory, yet it looks a bit odd on a list with much smaller, resource-poor entities such as Pitcairn Island, the Caribbean islands, Gibraltar, and the Falklands. New Caledonia has one-fourth of the world supply of nickel,

and though the price per ton suffered almost a 50 percent drop over the past year because of the global economic crisis, the mining-based economy remains capable of sustainable development if the income distribution is better managed.

In this “postcolonial” phase of the country’s history, when the Noumea Accord serves as a kind of interim constitution, the political landscape is divided mainly between those who support full independence and those who want enlarged autonomy (the status quo at this point), much like the situation in French Polynesia.

Unfortunately for the latter, the near-parity of independence and autonomy supporters has caused nine changes in the top leadership in Papeete since 2004, because a few politicians can switch sides and generate motions of no confidence to receive better posts in a new regime. In New Caledonia, Harold Martin of the centrist *Avenir Ensemble* (AE, Future Together) party, which caused a mini-revolution in local politics in 2004, explicitly urged his fellow French loyalists to unite and create a “pact of stability” to avoid a “Tahitian” situation (NC, 7 May 2009). But New Caledonia too has experienced fluctuating divisions on both sides of the political spectrum. Since the Noumea Accord brought increasing self-government, independence and autonomy are separated by concerns among the immigrant majority over economic dependency and security. For most Europeans, Asians, Polynesians, mixed-race people (*métis*), and some Kanak, French citizenship gives them legitimacy and safety, so they often point to signs of instability in neigh-

boring Melanesian countries as object lessons to avoid.

The Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) has been the primary pro-independence force since 1984, when its boycott of provincial elections caused a near civil war. But its two leading coalition members, the older Union Calédonienne (UC) and the Parti de Libération Kanak (Palika), have long been rivals, and only rarely and recently (as in the French legislative elections of 2007) have they campaigned on the same list. Each has tried to claim the FLNKS label, but forming separate electoral lists weakened the Kanak vote so much in the 2004 provincial polls that no FLNKS candidate was elected in the populous, multiethnic Southern Province, despite the presence there of a large Kanak workforce, sometimes called the largest “tribe.” In 2009, the FLNKS list in the South managed to unify under Rock Wamytan, who formerly headed the FLNKS, the UC, and the subregional Melanesian Spearhead Group. Two smaller members of the FLNKS are the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RDO), which is composed of Polynesian migrants from Wallis and Futuna, and the Union Progressiste Mélanésienne (UPM). The small Libération Kanak Socialiste (LKS), led by former radical Nidoish Naisseline, and the new Parti Travailleiste (PT, or Labor Party), an offshoot of a radical labor federation, the Union Syndicaliste des Travailleurs Kanak et Exploités (USTKE), round out the main actors who at least nominally support full independence.

The UC-Palika rivalry has prevented the FLNKS from having a president since 2001, when Wamytan last held

the position. In 2009, after much failed negotiation over unity, the two parties again ran on separate lists in the Kanak-ruled North and Islands provinces (NC, 31 Jan, 18 April 2009). Palika and the PT both support revolutionary socialist independence, but the former has lately promoted peaceful dialogue within established institutions, while the latter’s parent, USTKE, has been the most militant in actions. The FLNKS reminded the public of its accomplishments before the May elections: the acquisition of quasi-autonomous Kanak rule over two out of the three provinces; the reinscription of the country on the UN decolonization list in 1986; and successful negotiations with Paris and the local loyalists in the Matignon-Oudinot and Noumea accords, which yielded economic rebalancing between the multiethnic South and the two Kanak-ruled provinces and also the irreversible transfer of self-governing powers to the country (it had autonomy in the 1950s but France took that away in the 1960s to retain control over nickel mining). The two accords also brought official recognition of the Kanak identity through cultural and linguistic institutional support, land reform, the Customary Senate, the establishment of mining and industrial projects in the Kanak-run North, and the restriction of the electorate to long-term residents in the provincial elections and future referendums (KOL, 30 April 2009). Meanwhile USTKE, led by Gérard Jodar, waged a five-month-long, highly disruptive protest against domestic carrier Air Calédonie (Aircal) over the firing of an employee. The strike became a symbol to younger radicals of colonial repression, and it

also pitted USTKE against Naisseline, the president of Aircal (NC, 20 May 2009), whose defense of company policy won support from a wide range of civil associations and political parties.

But if the FLNKS remained divided, so did the loyalists. In 2004, centrists became more prominent (as they had been in the early 1980s and mid-1990s), challenging the Gaullist (French nationalist) “politics of fear” and adopting a social democratic approach to New Caledonia’s inequalities (as the earlier UC had done in the 1950s). But the 2007 French legislative elections were a major setback for the centrists, as the Gaullists kept all three seats that the country holds in the Parliament in Paris, despite centrist control over the Territorial and Southern Province governments. Nicolas Sarkozy, the Gaullist French president elected that year, forged an alliance between his metropolitan Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) and the local Rassemblement founded by Jacques Lafleur in 1977–78 to oppose Kanak independence; the resulting acronym is RUMP, now headed by conservative firebrand Pierre Frogier. Frogier used momentum from the 2007 elections to divide the AE into a faction led by UMP member Martin and a Calédonie Ensemble (CE) offshoot led by Philippe Gomès. Like Martin, Gomès is more willing to dialogue with pro-independence groups to achieve the “common destiny” proposed by the Noumea Accord. Both the AE and CE seek another negotiated accord on the “exit” from the Noumea Accord, whereas Frogier has called for a referendum in 2014 to “purge” independence from the local

political discourse, claiming that the FLNKS only talked of independence for electoral purposes, since it could never gain a majority of votes in favor of it (NC, 10 April 2009). He questioned “ambiguities” in the accord and insisted on keeping New Caledonia within the French republic. But after the elections, he seems to have been influenced by Lafleur’s call for a consensual solution to avoid the danger (given the 1980s uprising) of a humiliating defeat for the Kanak (NC, 24 April, 26 Oct 2009). Simon Loueckhote, who is still senator to Paris from the time before Frogier displaced Lafleur in the Rassemblement, now ran on the AE list with Martin and Didier Leroux (NC, 30 April 2009).

Almost 900 candidates on twenty-four party lists vied for 76 provincial assembly seats (of whom 54 would proportionally become the Congress). The electorate consisted only of those present in the territory in 1998 or who had ten years residence. That eliminated about 13 percent of voters, though the proportion in Noumea, the capital, was perhaps 25 percent. Long-term residents were considered “citizens” of New Caledonia, unlike the days before the 1980s when new immigrants were able to vote fairly quickly and massive arrivals during a nickel boom pushed the Kanak and other supporters of autonomy to the political margins. In the South, the RUMP won 15 seats, and the AE and CE won a total of 19 seats. Wamytan’s unified FLNKS made a comeback with 4 seats, as did Lafleur’s loyalist Rassemblement pour la Calédonie (RPC) with 2, while the local National Front was eliminated, perhaps showing a shift in local politics (or the

effect of limiting the electorate). In the North, Palika won 9 seats (losing 2), while the UC-FLNKS won 8 (gaining 1), the new PT won 3, and loyalists won only 2 seats. In the Islands, loyalists were eliminated completely for the first time, as the UC won 6 (a gain of 2), against 4 for Palika; the LKS and PT each got 2 seats (NC, 11 May 2009). Together, supporters of independence won 43 percent of the seats in Congress, an impressive showing. If they had united in the election of the territorial cabinet, they might have won 5 out of 11 seats, but they did not and got only four ministries (NC, 12 May 2009). In the Islands, the UC allied with the LKS to back incumbent Neko Hnepeune as provincial president; in the North, Paul Néaoutyine of Palika won the presidency again but now had to share power with the UC; and in the South, Frogier became provincial president as part of a “republican pact” with the centrists (NC, 16 May 2009). Martin became president of the Congress, and Gomès president of the territorial cabinet. While retaining a ministry, Déwé Gorodé of Palika lost her vice presidency of the cabinet to the UC’s Pierre Ngaihoni (PIR, 15 June 2009). The French Council of State invalidated the election results in the Islands due to irregularities (a repeat of 1999), and in the new election held in November, Palika lost all its seats, while the UC and LKS allied again, and the PT took Palika’s seats for a total of 4 (NC, 17 Nov 2009). Loueckhote’s loyalist ticket in the Islands was eliminated, but he managed to get a cabinet seat in the central government via the AE (NC, 12 Nov 2009).

The UC and PT made some gains, but given New Caledonian demo-

graphics, French loyalists retained clear majorities in both the Southern Province and the Congress. Nic Maclellan has aptly asked whether the Noumea Accord process will build a common destiny “for all the communities or will it falter, re-creating the political cleavages that led to violent conflicts in the 1980s?” The country appears headed toward “a form of free association with France” (Maclellan 2009, 11–12). The League of the Rights of Man held three well-attended forums to assess the accord so far. At the first, legal scholar Jean-Yves Faberon called the accord a peace treaty whose compromise text is specific but also prone to rival interpretations. Labeling it a negotiated “treaty” highlighted the absence of one in 1853 when France “took possession” by a decree of Napoleon III; only the Kanak uprising in the 1980s made the consensual accords of 1988 and 1998 feasible. The Noumea Accord privileged Kanak identity through legal recognition for customary law, teaching Kanak languages in schools, creating a Customary Senate and the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, while also transferring significant governing authority, restricting the electorate on key votes, and creating a shared territorial cabinet. But protecting local job hiring, economic rebalancing, and developing country identity symbols are so far unfulfilled (NC, 22 Aug 2009; KOL, 26 Aug 2009). At a second forum, two sociologists reported that many residents felt poorly informed about the accord, most young people rarely discussed it, and life remained culturally segregated. Most people thought increasingly of having their own country, but they were divided

over its exact future status (NC, 27 Sept 2009). At the last forum, speakers represented the three main signers of the accord: settlers, Kanak, and Paris. Gomès evoked “emancipation,” “decolonization,” and the “double legitimacy” of settlers and Kanak in a common destiny. Néaoutyine agreed but voiced concern over continuing immigration and asserted that global interdependence today did not negate the right to independence. French High Commissioner Yves Dassonville promised state support for the “emergence of a citizenship” in a “multiethnic country” (NC, 16 Oct 2009).

In his first presidential address, Gomès promoted “living together” and reiterated the centrists’ social democratic goals of 2004. The RUMP had called that approach too “interventionist” in the past but now accepted it as allied loyalists, because the centrists have continued to outpoll Frogier’s Gaullists. Gomès spoke of keeping one’s word, redistributing the wealth, government management of development, protecting the environment, peaceful dialogue (including with labor unions, as the USTKE strike had ended with Jodar in prison), creating a local citizenship, and a consensual solution to future status, ideally through shared sovereignty with France but with UN consultation. Martin backed Gomès but suggested asking Alain Christnacht, who had helped so much with the previous two accords, to do so again, as the RUMP, UC, and PT still wanted a referendum in 2014 for different reasons (NC, 1 Sept, 2 Sept, 12 Sept 2009). Gomès led a delegation to New York to address the UN Decolonization Committee, citing progress in provincial and ter-

ritorial autonomy and land reform, while FLNKS delegates repeated their concern over immigration and met with the Non-aligned Movement that had helped to put New Caledonia on the decolonization list (NC, 30 Sept, 13 Oct 2009). Gomès also led a delegation to the Copenhagen climate talks, vowing to reduce pollution. The limbo of autonomy status revealed itself when France declined to include Gomès’s team in its own mission to the conference, because New Caledonian mining and processing projects would elevate the country to among the world’s top five producers of carbon dioxide emissions (NC, 5 Nov, 17 Dec 2009). In December, the complex process of transferring authority over secondary education and air and sea transportation from Paris to Noumea was concluded with a unanimous vote in Congress, after obtaining promises of metropolitan financial and technical support, and approval from the French Parliament and Economic and Social Council to pass another “country law” (NC, 1 Dec 2009). That month, Congress passed a law to favor locals in hiring—a restriction that labor unions like USTKE have demanded for a decade, often militantly. But the law made exceptions for jobs that New Caledonians could not easily fill, drawing criticism from some pro-independence parties, who see the basic issue as one of limiting local citizenship to long-term residents (NC, 31 Dec 2009).

In June, as he prepared to visit Martinique and Guadeloupe, where labor unions were on strike to protest the high cost of living, French President Sarkozy promised equality for the overseas territories. He said

that their residents should enjoy the same standard of living as people in the metropolitan republic (PIR, 24 June 2009). He also promised those two *départements* a referendum on expanded self-government (NC, 9 Oct 2009). French public debt is the highest since 1995 because of the global economic crisis (BBC, 30 Dec 2009), but in 2009, France gave twice as much development aid to resource-poor French Polynesia as it did to New Caledonia (NC, 18 May 2009). Maurice Ponga was elected as the French overseas member of the European Parliament, continuing the RUMP's monopoly over representation in Europe, though only 20 percent of New Caledonian voters cast ballots. The country receives US\$14 million over five years from the European Union, compared to US\$2 billion per year from France (PIR, 8 June 2009). Sarkozy planned to head up another France-Pacific Summit in Noumea and to visit Australia promoting regional integration. But he could not make it, so the minister of foreign affairs and the overseas secretary filled in. Two dozen countries from around Oceania sent representatives to hear promises of twice as much French aid money, to talk about climate change amid the smokestacks, and to enjoy the hotels (PIR, 7 May 2009; NC, 28 July, 31 July 2009). A surprise issue that was quickly swept under the diplomatic rug was an accord signed by the FLNKS and the Customary Senate that gave uninhabited Matthew and Hunter islets to Vanuatu, despite French disapproval. Paris and loyalists invoked the "common destiny" idea to protest the interisland deal backed by the Melanesian Spearhead Group

(NC, 27 July 2009; PIR, 28 July 2009). New Caledonia is slated to be France's naval headquarters in the Pacific, supposedly to patrol "French" Exclusive Economic Zones and to fight terror, the postcommunist bogeyman. Meanwhile, Paris has finally agreed to compensate nuclear radiation victims in French Polynesia for its atomic testing there from 1966 to 1996 (PIR, 23 Dec 2009).

The New Caledonian economy has suffered from the world economic crisis, most notably the nickel industry, though tourism remained stagnant at fewer than 100,000 visitors per year, half as many as Fiji despite the latter's military regime (PIR, 24 Nov 2009). The high cost of living has hindered tourism, and ship passengers say that Noumea "has no soul." Not only is it expensive, but most shops are closed between noon and 2 pm, after 6 pm, and on weekends. Efforts to open for longer hours, build shops on the docks, or expand the hospitality industry outside Noumea have not succeeded so far (NC, 20 May, 17 June 2009). Some locals blame the lack of interest in tourism on the mining economy and on French budget subsidies. Agriculture has survived the crisis, at least in ranching and piggeries if not in poultry, but the importation of foods has also increased. Inflation is the highest in ten years (3.7 percent), yet major development projects at Gouaro Deva and Dumbea have continued to create jobs in the South (NC, 24 June, 16 Sept, 9 Dec 2009; PIR, 25 June 2009). The government, pushed by the Union Syndicaliste des Ouvriers et Employés de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (USOENC), has attempted to reduce the cost of living, taking steps such as fix-

ing prices, reducing taxes, regulating mining, and passing importer antitrust laws, and it has also raised the minimum wage in increments (*NC*, 25 Feb, 10 April, 21 Oct 2009). It invests in infrastructure, affordable housing, and job training, with French financial aid and nickel income (*NC*, 25 Feb, 3 April 2009). The loyalists and Palika supported Gomès's nearly US\$2 billion budget in December, backing his social democratic program, while the UC and PT said the budget did not go far enough in helping the rural and urban poor (*NC*, 22 Dec 2009). The once-dominant Société le Nickel (*SLN*) talked of layoffs despite labor protests, but the North continued to build its Koniambo nickel processing and commercial development projects near Koné, the provincial capital, benefiting from its relationship with metal-processor Posco of Korea (*NC*, 21 July, 20 Nov 2009). In the South, the processing plant project at Goro still raised concerns over pollution because of an acid leak, but it was scheduled to begin operations in early 2010. The long disposal pipes into the sea at both Koniambo and Goro have aroused debate over how much pollution is tolerable (*NC*, 27 Nov, 3 Dec 2009).

A new census revealed a population of 245,580, a bit lower than expected. Ethnic data was collected this time, after being banned by French President Jacques Chirac in 2003. It should help to assess the impact of economic rebalancing and speculation about a rising métis element when it becomes available (*NC*, 15 Nov 2009). A census in Wallis and Futuna showed that its population has declined by 10 percent since 2003, while the number of migrants to New Caledonia from

that resource-poor French territory has risen 10 percent, to 25,000 (*PIR*, 27 July 2009). Wallisian immigration had contributed to making the indigenous Kanak a minority in the 1970s and provided hired militias against Kanak militants in the 1980s. Violence erupted again between the communities in 2001, and most Wallisians still vote loyalist out of economic dependency. But Martin negotiated a special accord between the two countries, and this year delegations from Wallis and Futuna engaged in reconciliation ceremonies with Kanak. An exposition at the Tjibaou Cultural Center also promoted mutual understanding between the two communities, and partnerships in local economic development are being pursued (*NC*, 27 July, 9 Dec 2009). Migrants from both Oceanian peoples mingle in the growing squatter camps around Noumea, where their leaders complain of a lack of equal opportunity (*NC*, 23 Dec 2009). Juvenile delinquency among unemployed Oceanians has stirred efforts among civic associations, the police, and the Customary Senate to find solutions such as more positive activities and education in customary values (*NC*, 8 June, 31 Aug 2009). Meanwhile, Kanak commemorated the twentieth anniversary of Tjibaou's death, Gorodé planned for the 2010 Festival of Melanesian Arts in Noumea, and civic and government leaders held the annual 24th of September Citizenship Festival at the Mwâ Kâ totem pole in Noumea despite a boycott by the RUMP (*NC*, 29 April, 8 July, 25 Sept 2009). Museums also educated residents about the shared history of the country in displays of precolonial Kanak

art, the Kanak revolt of 1917, and the graphic art of Bernard Berger, who has tried to promote a sense of common destiny through typically Caledonian humor (NC, 19 Jan, 7 Sept, 22 Sept 2009).

DAVID CHAPPELL

References

- BBC, British Broadcasting Corporation. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>
- KOL, Kanaky Online. Discussion group. <http://fr.groups.yahoo.com/group/kanaky>
- MacLellan, Nic. 2009. *New Government in New Caledonia: The May 2009 Elections in a French Pacific Territory*. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Briefing Note 3. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University. http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/BriefingNotes/BriefingNote_NewGovtinNewCaledonia.pdf
- NC, *Les Nouvelles-Calédoniennes*. Daily. Noumea. <http://www.lnc.nc>
- PIR, Pacific Islands Report. <http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport>

PAPUA

During 2009, the Papua and West Papua provinces of Indonesia witnessed a number of prominent events that maintained an atmosphere of conflict between the Government of Indonesia and Papuans in general. In cities, secessionist demands were expressed openly in the mass media. In remote highland areas, a number of very low level armed attacks occurred, allegedly conducted by secessionist groups of the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, or OPM);

these included a series of shootings in the concession area of the gigantic Freeport mining company, targeting Freeport employees. Papuan youth and student groups dominated by highlanders became prominent actors in political opposition in 2009. The year closed with the killing of influential OPM leader Kelly Kwalik. The political picture of Papua and West Papua remains generally somber since the implementation of the Special Autonomy law in 2001.

In the media, opinion makers at universities, politicians, and Papuan religious leaders ceaselessly criticized the implementation of the Special Autonomy law. Most feel that very little significant progress has been achieved over the past eight years in addressing the roots of the Papua conflict, such as disputes about history, human rights abuses, failure of development, and most importantly the marginalization of the indigenous Papuans. Despite high budgets for the two provinces, there was little improvement in public services for remote areas, and the already bad image of the Indonesian government in the eyes of Papuans deteriorated further due to corruption on the part of local Papuan bureaucrats. Many prominent Papuan intellectuals have concluded that the Special Autonomy legislation has stagnated, and has failed to function as a “middle way” to solve the roots of the Papua conflict.

The failure of Special Autonomy has driven many parties to think about how to break the political impasse. Hoping to open a process of dialogue, a number of researchers from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences

(Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia), collaborating with nongovernmental organizations and government officials, have been striving to gain support from important political figures and high officials in the Indonesian government. The proposed dialogue is expected to involve representatives of Papuan pro-independence groups and delegates of the central government, and would be open-ended, covering all issues, including the demands for independence and the revision of the Special Autonomy law. Those advocating dialogue in Jakarta have in fact received a sympathetic hearing from many individuals within the Indonesian Parliament and the government (except from certain intelligence and security-related bodies).

In Papua, priests from various denominations connected with a Jakarta-based peace working group, under the leadership of Rector Neles Tebay of the Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Fajar Timur (Philosophical and Theological College) in Jayapura, collaborated with local nongovernmental organizations, student leaders, and *adat* (customary) groups, to create constituencies of dialogue from various local actors, including representatives of the armed pro-independence groups. These constituencies talked about the necessity of dialogue as a more realistic method for furthering the interests of the Papuan majority. People are now discussing the possibility of a compromise on the issue of independence. But crucial questions remain. Papuans question the political will of Jakarta, especially given the failure of many aspects of Special Autonomy. Deep mistrust of Jakarta prevails, and the Indonesian

government has no policy blueprint to resolve the Papua conflict. The suggestion of conducting peace talks with Papuan oppositions has received no response from the president. Most of the policies of Jakarta remain ad hoc and reactionary in nature.

The presidential and legislative elections in 2009 were successful despite some tensions and minor disturbances in Papua. Almost half of those who managed to gain seats in the Papua provincial parliament—24 (the Danis and the Me) out of 56 members—are of highlands origin. However, in general Jakarta policies on Papua did not change significantly this year. In dealing with the violent conduct of Papuan opposition, the police did not retaliate as aggressively as before. The military stayed more in the background, and the Indonesian government restrained the use of repressive measures. Persuasive and law enforcement approaches were more prominent this year, even though a number of activists were tried and sent to prison and there was an overall increase in the number of prisoners of conscience.

On the other hand, the office of the coordinating minister for social welfare initiated a “welfare approach” policy. The government declared that it would welcome any resistance groups in the jungle or elsewhere to “return to the fold” of the Indonesian government. In 2008, the Indonesian government launched special Integrated Donations (Bantuan Terpadu) for village development. Last year, it provided 140 billion Indonesian rupiahs (IDR) for building village facilities (school buildings, teacher housing, village clinics, and so on) as well as 264 units of people’s housing

for those ex-OPM combatants in Pegunungan Bintang and Lani Jaya regencies who renounced their struggle for independence. (IDR10,000 is equivalent to approximately US\$1.08).

Also under the welfare approach policy, the Indonesian government tried to reach out to a few prominent pro-independence figures such as Tadius Yogi and Nicolaas Jouwe. In August and September, the ministry approached Yogi, TPN/OPM commander of Kodap IV Paniai (TPN [Tentara Pembebasan Nasional], or National Liberation Army, is the military wing of the OPM). During his visit to the regency of Paniai on 8 September 2009, Minister Aburizal Bakrie said that he was prepared to meet Yogi. However, the meeting was canceled because of a report that Yogi was sick. Later, Yogi admitted that he had refused to see the minister because the Papua struggle is not about “food and drink.” “We are defending the freedom of West Papua which had been stolen by Indonesia,” he said (Tabloid Jubi Online, 26 Nov 2009). Yogi reportedly claimed that the minister offered him IDR60 billion on the condition that he renounce his struggle for Papuan political independence.

The Ministry of Social Welfare also invited former pro-independence leader Nicolaas Jouwe (now eighty-four years old), who has been living in exile in the Netherlands for more than forty years, to return home. Jouwe was a prominent member of the New Guinea Council established by the Dutch colonial government in the 1960s and one of the founding fathers of the Papua independence movement. Thanks to Franzalbert Joku and his organization, the Independent

Group Supporting the Autonomous Region of Papua within the Republic of Indonesia, which cooperated with Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands Effendi (Fanny) Habibie, Jouwe accepted the invitation of the Indonesian government. On 22 March 2009, Jouwe visited Jakarta and his hometown, Jayapura. On 26 March, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono accepted Jouwe’s visit, which marked his return to the fold of the Republic of Indonesia. It is almost certain that Jouwe will spend the rest of his life as an Indonesian citizen. In January 2010, it was reported that Jouwe had returned to Jayapura for good. Once, he told this author that he wanted to die in his land of birth (Jouwe, pers comm, Delft, 1 Dec 2009). In spite of these symbolic successes, this welfare approach policy is partial, in that it involves reconciliation only with a few individuals and not with the resistance groups in general. Those who have already gone through a process of reconciliation with the Indonesian government are seen as traitors by other Papuans.

The Indonesian government also seems to be continuing its effort to persuade Papuans who have fled abroad to return. This year, the policy targeted refugees who have lived in Papua New Guinea for decades. After a long and tiring process, in November 2009 the Indonesian government managed to convince some of the refugees to repatriate to Papua, Indonesia. Out of 708 Papuans who planned to do so, 141 went home to Indonesia; 68 returned from Wewak City and 73 from Port Moresby. According to Franzalbert Joku, the fact that these Papuans were willing to go home is

proof that the Special Autonomy law has been successful.

Very low level armed attacks occurred a number of times in Tingginambut, Puncak Jaya, a remote part of the central highland regency. Between January and March 2009, there were five OPM attacks on the security apparatus. Besides targeting security facilities and thus killing security officers (police force and/or military), OPM attacks now targeted civilians (migrants) in an attempt to create unrest among migrants and add to the bargaining power of the OPM with the Papuans. This change in tactics, however, has been counter-productive and has not advanced OPM objectives.

On the evening of 8 January 2009, a group of TPN/OPM attacked a small police post in Tingginambut, a remote highland area. Four guns and sixty-one bullets were taken away. This time the OPM attack injured a civilian, Ivana Helen, the twenty-one-year-old wife of a police officer. On 21 February, OPM did some shooting at the same police post from afar. The Republic of Indonesia "Red and White" flag (Sang Saka Merah Putih) that was hoisted above the hill was pulled down and burned. On 10 March, two civilian *ojek* (motorcycle taxi) drivers were shot to death. An unknown group whose faces had been blackened with charcoal also attacked two women. They were suspected to be the same group who confiscated the police guns in January 2009. On 14 March, OPM attacked a group of patrolling Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, or TNI) soldiers. One TNI soldier was reportedly killed during the shooting in District

Tingginambut. Furthermore, the OPM destroyed Gurage Bridge to deter the movement of the security apparatus that might be used to retaliate. On 15 April, the OPM again attacked a group of police in Tingginambut, resulting in one killed and six policemen injured. District Head (Bupati) Lukas Enembe suspected that the OPM group responsible for these attacks was under the leadership of Goliath Tabuni or Anton Tabuni. The Tabuni clan was reportedly involved in attacks dating back to 2003 at the same area of Puncak Jaya.

On 20 October, sporadic attacks by an unknown person or persons, shooting at civilian targets, took place in Mulia, Puncak Jaya. In the same area a more recent attack targeted non-Papuan migrants. A migrant from Pati, Central Java Province, died and a Papuan was injured after being attacked and shot by an unknown group of fifteen people. The victims and their colleagues were working together building the Kalome Bridge. A car was also burned during the attack.

Disturbances occurred not only in the highlands but also in the coastal area of Serui. On 11 July 2009, there were some attacks, sweeping, and armed contacts in quick succession, related to the arrival of OPM leaders Ferdinando Worabay and Decky Imbiri. An unknown person exploded a fish bomb, and later the police burned three houses of local inhabitants and arrested and interrogated fourteen people. Eleven of the suspects were either children or teenagers and were subsequently released; the remaining three were taken to Papua Regional Police Headquarters in Jayapura. The police investigated

the military training of OPM under the leadership of Ferdinando Worabay, and of the West Papua National Authority under the leadership of Wilson Uruwaya.

Not far from Jayapura, another violent event occurred; this time the perpetrators were TNI soldiers. In Kampung Kibai, on Monday, 22 June 2009, a sixteen-year-old local inhabitant named Isak Psakor was shot by a member of the Indonesian army near the Indonesia–Papua New Guinea border. Isak and his brother Wens, along with two of their relatives, were on their way home to Kibai village from Skotyauw, Papua New Guinea. A dog that belonged to the army ran after Isak, who tried to escape up a tree but was shot as he climbed. The army spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Susilo, asserted that the Psakor family had been asked to stop but had kept on running, which led to the shooting. The Regional Military Command of West Papua (Kodam Trikora) investigated the six soldiers who were suspected of the shooting, but to date no one has been vindicated or put on trial.

On 16 October 2008, the National Committee of West Papua (Komite Nasional Papua Barat, or KNPB), under the leadership of Bukhtar Tabuni, had staged its first demonstration in Jayapura to support the launch of International Parliamentarians for West Papua (IPWP). This demonstration was followed by calls from Benny Wenda, an exiled independence leader in London, to boycott Indonesia's 2009 general election and to have a Papua referendum. Consequently, the police detained Tabuni on 3 December 2008, and another KNPB activist,

Sebby Sembom, on 17 December. The arrests ignited several demonstrations in Jakarta and Jayapura on Wednesday, 25 January 2009, the first day of Tabuni's trial. Tabuni and Sembom were charged under articles concerning subversion and hostility to the state. In Wamena on 25 February, the KNPB-linked group Solidaritas Peduli Hak Asasi Manusia dan Demokrasi Jayawijaya (Human Rights and Democracy Solidarity) staged a demonstration in front of the local court building, demanding the release of the KNPB leaders.

KNPB is a student-led action committee that emerged in 2008. Judging from events during 2008 and 2009, KNPB has developed a wide Papuan student and youth network, primarily in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Manado, Jayapura, Nabire, and Wamena. It combines a popular movement with populist issues, such as the referendum, release of political prisoners, and elimination of military violence. KNPB maintains "close communication" with Benny Wenda in Oxford. The series of demonstrations in 2008 came in response to previous events, beginning with the IPWP declaration in London. But KNPB's structure has not been clear from the beginning. According to the chief of Police Resort Jayapura, Adjunct High Commissioner of Police (Ajun Komisaris Besar Polisi) Robert Jhoenso, Demus Wenda is currently the secretary of KNPB. However, this official claim was rejected by Tabuni as head of KNPB.

A bigger demonstration in 2009 was a mass rally on 10 March at the provincial parliament building in Jayapura, with hundreds of participants under the command of Victor

F Yeimo. Another rally involving hundreds of people occurred under the same leader on 24 March at the Papua parliament building at Jayapura.

The first demonstration called for a boycott of the general election and support of a referendum; the second invited Papuans to unite under the umbrella of KNPB. Besides that, the 24 March rally also voiced a strong call for the withdrawal of all Indonesian military troops from District Puncak Jaya and West Papua and an end to the violence in Papua. The demonstrations were guarded by a huge security deployment from the Mobile Brigade and took place peacefully, although the 24 March rally was marred by the arrest of four Dutch journalists: Gabriel Bette, Pieter Mariauw Smith, Elske Schouten, and Ronal Wigma.

A later KNPB demonstration related to the launch of International Lawyers for West Papua (ILWP) in Guyana on 3 April 2009. This event apparently gave more strength to a Papuan response. In Nabire on 2 April 2009, under Zet Giyai of KNPB, thousands attended a massive demonstration in support of the ILWP launching with issues similar to those expressed in previous demonstrations. But this demonstration also mounted a challenge to the approaching national legislative election. A local religious leader, Pendeta Daud Auwe, was quoted as saying: "We want freedom, not election" (IMC Jakarta, 3 April 2009). The movement continued with the establishment of a "posko" (command post) for KNPB Nabire in the national heroes cemetery at Taman Gizi. This initiative ignited a harsh response from the local police authorities. The posko was burned

on the morning of 6 April 2009, and fifteen activists were captured.

In the April event the authorities seemed to be less in control. Due to the massive number of participants, a clash between police and the crowds could not be avoided. Several Papuans were injured. The arrests angered local people, and another clash between the masses and the police was inevitable.

Likewise, violence marked a later series of events in Papua. Besides those related to the demonstrations, two seemingly separate incidents claimed the lives of civilians. On 8 April in Wamena, three migrant *ojek* drivers were killed. These murders created suspicion that the perpetrators were either OPM or KNPB. The violence escalated on 9 April when the Police Sector Headquarters of Abepura was attacked at the same time the national legislative election was taking place. The hostilities did not abate, and on 11 April someone threatened to burn down an electricity-generating facility in Waena. On 12 April, another *ojek* driver of migrant origins was murdered. On the same day, a number of bombs were found in Muara Tami near the PNG border.

In the midst of these violent incidents, on 13 April KNPB released a statement signed by Victor F Yeimo that claimed responsibility for the attack on Abepura police headquarters as well as for burning a building at Cendrawasih University. In the press release, KNPB mentioned the following reasons for the attack on the police headquarters: (1) the unsettled political conflict between Jakarta and Papua; (2) a claim that the 2009 election was an illegitimate project of Indonesia that denied West

Papuan independence; (3) an emotional response on the part of West Papuan students against the killing of Opinus Tabuni by the TNI/police on 9 August 2008 in Wamena; (4) the evacuation of the people's tent above Theys Eluay's graveyard by the police; and (5) the shooting of six people during a peace rally in Nabire. KNPB also claimed that the burning of the university building was in response to the elimination of the basic rights of students due to the bureaucratic campus structure and ethnic favoritism on the part of Cendrawasih University's rector. In response to those actions, on 18 May 2009, the Jayawijaya police authority arrested eight KNPB student activists in Wamena. Previously, on 22 April, the police had arrested five suspects in the police sector attack.

Early in the morning of Wednesday, 16 December, OPM Commander Kelly Kwalik was shot to death by antiterrorist Special Detachment 88 of the Indonesian Police in a house in Timika town, in the southern part of Papua Province. Five Papuan Amungme tribe members who accompanied him were arrested. An autopsy was performed in Jayapura on Kwalik's body, which was returned to Timika two days later. In a ceremony attended by hundreds of Papuan highlanders, Kwalik was buried in the center of Timika town.

Kwalik was the OPM's Commander of Territorial War Command (Kodap) III Nemangkawi (Mimika), the region where the gigantic US Freeport Gold Company has been operating. His career as a guerilla fighter started in 1977 when he was in charge of sabotaging Freeport's facilities during the political turmoil that spread all over the highlands area. He was

responsible for taking hostage a team of researchers from the Lorentz Expedition in Mapnduma in 1996. He was also allegedly responsible for the kidnapping of two Belgian journalists in 2001. Due to his notorious actions in the past, any violent conduct in the area was almost always associated with his group. For example, the military immediately accused Kwalik's OPM guerilla group of the 2002 Freeport shootings, which had taken the lives of two US citizens.

Beginning on 11 July, a series of shootings took place in the Freeport area. An Australian employee, Drew Nicholas Grant, and a Freeport security officer, Markus Rante Alo, were shot dead. A policeman named Marson Petipelohy was killed when his throat was cut. During the investigation, seven local Amungme people were arrested but released soon afterward due to lack of evidence. Despite the deployment of more than a thousand soldiers to back up the police, a few more shootings happened in the same area, but apparently stopped near the end of November. After the death of Kwalik, the shootings occurred once again.

Kwalik's men were repeatedly accused of the shootings by the Papua Regional Military Commander Major General A Y Nasution. Interestingly, the regional police chief at the time with authority in the matter, Inspector General Bagus Ekodanto, had a different opinion. He claimed to have met with Kwalik, who denied responsibility for the shootings. Moreover, based on Chief Ekodanto's initial inquiry, there was no indication or proof that Kwalik was responsible for the shootings. But suddenly, Chief

Ekodanto and other chiefs at the reGENCY level were removed. The new chiefs immediately announced that Kwalik was indeed the mastermind behind the shootings, a point of view that corresponded with the military's allegations. This pattern is precisely the same as a shooting case in 2002. The regional police chief at the time, I Made Mangku Pastika, strove to uncover the perpetrators, who allegedly were members of Kopassus intelligence, the Indonesian army's elite Special Forces. In that case as well, Pastika was immediately replaced.

Many leaders of nongovernmental organizations who have close contact with the police claim that the shootings in 2002 and 2009 had to do with rivalry between police units and armed forces units over the distribution of security funds within the Freeport area. The rivalry began in 1996, after the so-called handy-talky riots, when the armed forces enjoyed a great amount of money to support the security within and around the Freeport area. (These riots happened in Timika, Papua, in February–March 1996, allegedly orchestrated by the Indonesian special armed forces unit Kopassus. The riots were under the command of a group of people who were in the middle of an angry crowd, using “handy-talkies,” or handheld, two-way radios.) Recently, thanks to security sector reform at the national level, security for the multinational corporation has been taken over by the police. The shootings might have been part of a “negotiation” between the armed forces, the police, and Freeport. By killing Kwalik and making him the scapegoat for the shootings, the police and the military might have

been trying to end rumors about the rivalry between the police and the military.

MURIDAN S WIDJOJO

MUCH APPRECIATION to *Irine H Gayatri*, who helped collect and select materials for this review.

References

- Aliansi Demokrasi untuk Papua blog. <http://andawat-papua.blogspot.com/>
- Antara News: Portal Berita Indonesia. <http://www.antaraneWS.com/>
- Bintang Papua*. Daily. Jayapura.
- Cenderawasih Pos*. Daily. Jayapura. <http://www.cenderawasihpos.com/>
- Harian Online KabarIndonesia. <http://www.kabarIndonesia.com/>
- IMC Jakarta, Independent Media Center Jakarta. <http://jakarta.indymedia.org/>
- Inovasi Portal Berita. <http://www.inilah.com/>
- Jakarta Post*. Daily. Jakarta. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/>
- KNPB–Papua Barat blog. <http://knpb.blogspot.com/>
- Kompas*. Daily. Jakarta. <http://www.kompas.com/>
- Metro TV News (Jakarta). <http://www.metrotvnews.com/>
- Situs Berita Online Indonesia. <http://www.tempointeraktif.com/>
- Suara Pembaruan*. Daily. Jakarta. <http://www.suarapembaruan.com/>
- Tabloid Jubi Online: An Alternative Media in Tanah Papua. <http://tabloidjubi.com/>
- West Papua Today blog. <http://wptoday.wordpress.com/>

Widjojo, Muridan. 2009. Negotiating the Past and Looking to the Future. *Inside Indonesia* 98 (Oct–Dec). <http://insideindonesia.org/content/view/full/1269/47/>

Widjojo, Muridan, editor. 2009. *Papua Road Map: Negotiating the Past, Improving the Present and Securing the Future*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The government of Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare is pulling through in spite of the scandals that plagued the government in 2008 and is likely to successfully complete its full second term (2007–2012) in Parliament, provided that there is no major shift in allegiance and a vote of no confidence does not dissolve the government in the next two years. Prime Minister Somare announced during the country's thirty-fourth independence anniversary that he will not step down as prime minister until Papua New Guinea gets back on the right track (*Post Courier*, 17 Sept 2009). That was the latest pledge from Sir Michael, who is serving as the longest-running member of Parliament (MP) ever in the Commonwealth group of nations.

In March 2009, the National Executive Council (NEC) had its first meeting of the year in Enga Province. It was one of the biggest political events ever held in the province. To welcome the prime minister and the NEC, the people of Enga had almost one hundred pigs, thirty cassowaries, and twenty goats on the menu. It was also a courtesy on the part of the Enga people to celebrate Sir Michael's forty years in politics. However, after delivering more than K142 million for

projects, Sir Michael left Enga earlier than expected. (One PNG kina [K1] equals approximately US\$.37.) The Joint District Planning and Budget Priorities Committee was to coordinate the spending, which caused some controversy. Sir Michael was offended by comments made by Enga Governor Peter Ipatas, who questioned the capabilities of the committee to account for millions of kina given to them. Ipatas questioned why the funds were going to committees instead of going to the established provincial government system (*Post Courier*, 2 March 2009).

The government also faced a number of challenges as it clung tightly to power in its endeavor to set a new record of successfully completing a second term. On 28 July 2009, the Opposition brought a no-confidence motion against the prime minister. The leader of Government Business and Minister for National Planning Paul Tiensten responded with a motion to adjourn Parliament until 10 November, even though there was a full quorum. All hell broke loose when the Speaker of Parliament, Jeffery Nape, ruled in favor of the adjournment motion, thus circumventing a vote of no confidence. This, as expected, drew the ire of the Opposition and nationwide condemnation of the integrity of the Speaker and the political process. Some observers commented that the government has used the office of the Speaker to protect the prime minister when a motion of no confidence was presented. Long-time political analyst Dr Ray Anere argued that the adjournment might prevent Parliament from meeting the constitutional requirement to sit for sixty-three days and would deny members of Parliament the free-

dom of speech and debate guaranteed under section 115 of the PNG Constitution (*Post Courier*, 30 July 2009).

The Opposition threatened to refer Prime Minister Somare, Speaker Nape, and Tiensten to the Ombudsman Commission for a possible breach of the constitution for their part in adjourning the Parliament. The Opposition also echoed the claim that Parliament would not reach its full nine weeks or sixty-three days a year (*Post Courier*, 13 Oct 2009).

On 29 July, in a move that surprised many, eleven members of Parliament from the ruling National Alliance Party joined the Opposition. These members were PNG Country Party Leader Jamie Maxtone-Graham (Anglimp South Wahgi), Thompson Harokaqveh (Goroka), Peter Ipatas (Enga Province), Samson Kuli (Usino Bundi), Sai Sailon (Kainantu), Jim Nomane (Chuave), Boka Kondra (North Fly), Bob Danaya (Western Province), Jack Cameron (Kiriwina-Goodenough), John Boito (Obura-Wanenara), and Peter Iwei (Telefomin). They described the Somare regime as evil, corrupt, and dictatorial. The members reported that when they had spoken of moving to the Opposition they had been threatened with cuts to their annual discretionary funds or special project funds (*Post Courier*, 29 July 2009).

After thirty-five years of struggle, by 2012 Papua New Guinea will have two new provinces: Hela and Jiwaka. On 11 March 2009, Parliament gave unanimous support for a law allowing for the creation of the provincial headquarters and administration of the new provinces. Papua New Guinea will then have a total of twenty-two

provinces. The vote was 86 to 0, far above the absolute majority vote of 73 (*Post Courier*, 12 March 2009).

The Somare government continued to fare exceptionally well in the face of tremendous odds and in spite of the scandals that dominated the previous year. In 2008, issues such as the clandestine flight of Julian Moti to Solomon Islands on a PNG Defence Force aircraft; the US\$40 million from the 2.1 percent of the sale of log exports held in a bank account in Singapore by a government minister; the US\$30 million “Taiwan dollar diplomacy scandal”; Prime Minister Somare’s shareholding in the company Pacific Registry of Ship Ltd “in trust for the Independent State of PNG”; and the prime minister’s court actions to stop the Ombudsman Commission and Public Prosecutor from referring him on allegations that he had not completed or provided annual returns since 1992 were all big news (see Kantha 2009). However, all these scandals, with the exception of the Moti Affair, were never fully investigated. Prime Minister Sir Michael and others were implicated for allegedly authorizing the covert flight of Moti out of the country but were not prosecuted. These scandals remain a dark spot in the record of the Somare government since it took office.

Perhaps the most dominant issue of this year was the liquefied natural gas (LNG) project. The government held and continues to hold many positive expectations that the K30 billion LNG project will drastically change the economic face and stature of the country. The landowners and the State stand to reap a considerable share of the benefits. The PNG government

and LNG project developer Exxon-Mobil spent a few months in early 2009 on the arduous task of negotiating the benefit-sharing agreement with the landowner groups. The government was successful in negotiating an agreement, but many landowners were caught unprepared and still lack a full understanding about how the project will affect them.

A forum on the benefit-sharing agreement involving landowner groups and government representatives was held at Kokopo in the East New Britain Province. To ensure that the LNG project remained on schedule, the government wanted an umbrella agreement, even though some landowners were against holding the forum at that time because no independent cost and benefit analysis was carried out (*The National*, 16 April 2009).

Aggrieved landowners took out a court injunction to prevent the forum—which they called a “development forum”—from being held in Kokopo. They argued that the State, through the Department of Petroleum and Energy and the developers, did not comply with the Oil and Gas Act. That act requires that a benefit-sharing agreement can only be agreed to in a “development forum,” and that a “development forum” can only be held or convened after a full-scale social mapping and landowner identification is carried out (*Post Courier*, 28 April 2009). The landowners finally agreed to convene the forum when the government explained that the meeting in Kokopo was not a “development forum” but was simply intended to promote cooperation and understanding of the different roles the stakeholders would play. There-

fore, any agreement reached by the State, developers, or landowners in that forum would not be binding.

Talks at the benefit-sharing agreement forum reached a stalemate when landowners and the Southern Highlands Provincial Government, led by MP Anderson Agiru, insisted that they be given 10 percent equity in the LNG project, when the State offered them 2 percent as the legally prescribed ceiling. The landowners threatened that they would not proceed with any agreements until their demands were considered. The State responded with an offer of 6.88 percent, but that still did not satisfy the landowners. The State eventually was compelled to settle at 8 percent. The landowners have therefore struck a landmark multibillion-dollar agreement, setting the benchmark for companies looking to share the proceeds of future projects with affected landowners. The landowners are expected to receive more than K20 billion in the thirty-year life of the project (Murphy 2009).

Even though the LNG project is not yet fully into its construction phase, the hype has already raised high expectations in the capital city, Port Moresby. A domino effect can be seen in numerous construction projects, expansion and competition between business houses, and new real estate developments taking place. Consequently, accommodation facilities such as rented apartments in some of the affluent locations of the city have sold out, and rental costs have reached extraordinarily high levels.

For most ordinary citizens, the looming LNG project may be just the opportunity they have been waiting for. It is anticipated that they will also

benefit, directly and indirectly, from the project. Local business ventures expect rapid expansion to supply the increased demand from the LNG workers and project developers. Perhaps most significant is that the increased employment opportunities will give workers leverage to negotiate better salaries. The government and the private sector are already seeing an exodus of highly educated and experienced public servants and technically skilled workers who are taking up jobs on the LNG project for salaries double, triple, and even quadruple what they were earning before.

However, there are also concerns that Papua New Guinea might not actually have the capacity to provide the required labor for the project. It was revealed by the Department of Labour and Industrial Relations that more than 7,500 local employees will be needed for the multibillion-kina LNG project, and the country cannot provide this labor force, let alone the 500 welders that the developers require. As the country lacks enough highly skilled or trained people to fill the huge number of job openings, Papua New Guinea now faces a possible influx of foreign workers taking those jobs while locals become mere spectators (*Post Courier*, 5 Nov 2009).

Nevertheless, the Somare government has generally performed extremely well in securing major partners and participating interests in the LNG project. These include Exxon-Mobil (through various affiliates, including Esso Highlands Ltd as operator) at 41.5 percent, Oil Search 34 percent, Santos 17.7 percent, Nippon Oil 5.4 percent, Mineral Resources Development Company 1.2 percent,

and Petromin PNG Holdings Ltd 0.2 percent (*Post Courier*, 7 Dec 2009).

Meanwhile, China, the world's second-biggest energy user, has agreed to buy liquefied natural gas from ExxonMobil Corporation's US\$10 billion venture in Papua New Guinea. Unipec Asia Co Ltd, a subsidiary of China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec, a state-owned oil company) signed an agreement to buy two million metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas a year under a multiyear contract—about 32 percent of the project's proposed output (*The National*, 28 April 2009). Prime Minister Somare said that the agreement was a boost for PNG–China bilateral relations (*The National*, 11 May 2009).

In December, Somare announced that the cabinet had approved another LNG project agreement led by Inter Oil. He also announced that the cabinet has also endorsed the appointment of the state company Petromin as equity shareholder in the project. Petromin is the 22.5 percent equity holder on behalf of the PNG government, with 20.5 percent of revenue to go to Petromin and 2.0 percent to the project agreement landowners. It is a significant milestone for Papua New Guinea to have two LNG projects that will add value to the development of the country and its people (*Sunday Chronicle*, 13 Dec 2009).

In an economic update for the East Asia and Pacific region, the World Bank said that Papua New Guinea's multibillion-kina LNG project holds major potential in terms of revenues and economic growth, both during the construction stage (2010–2013) and especially after production starts

in 2014. The report adds that a key challenge will be translating the strong macroeconomic performance and revenues from the extractive industry into improvements in living standards. The report also says that it is time to start thinking about setting up more robust institutional structures and mechanisms to save and use the windfalls from liquefied natural gas and other commodities in the future (World Bank 2009).

The government was heavily criticized by the Opposition and members of the public for the purchase of a new Falcon ultra-long range executive jet from the United States for K120 million. The Opposition described the purchase as a complete waste of public funds, particularly when the majority of grassroots people are struggling day by day to make ends meet. The government responded that the jet would be put on hire for government use by Air Niugini (*Post Courier*, 8 April 2009).

In May, an anti-Asian protest in Port Moresby organized by a non-governmental organization led to a chain-reaction attack on Asian businesses in the provincial towns of Lae, Madang, and Goroka. On 18 May, opportunists attempted to loot several Asian-owned shops in the provinces of Western Highlands, Chimbu, and Eastern Highlands, but quick action from police prevented what could have been a calamitous situation in these provinces. The looters' actions were condemned by a host of politicians and civil society leaders including Prime Minister Somare, Foreign Affairs Minister Sam Abal, Opposition leader Sir Mekere Morauta, and PNG Trade Union Congress General Secre-

tary John Paska. The Chinese Embassy in Port Moresby also expressed grave concern for the safety of its nationals and their businesses (*The National*, 19 May 2009).

Ousted Madang Governor Sir Arnold Amet called on the government and businesses to be serious about the localization of jobs, stop the continued employment of noncitizens for jobs that could be done by nationals, and ensure that skills transfer from noncitizens to locals actually occurs and is not just something on paper. Eastern Highlands Province Governor Malcolm Kela Smith petitioned the government in Parliament to remove Asian business people in the country, claiming that they have exploited locals. He claimed that Asian businesses were oppressing local employees and depriving them of their rights. Governor Smith further claimed that the problems were not the Asians themselves but the responsible government departments and leaders who had allowed foreigners to enter the country (*Post Courier*, 21 May 2009).

Soon after the anti-Asian riot, a Parliamentary Bipartisan Committee was set up to investigate the causes of the riot. During its deliberations the committee was told by immigration officers that there were up to 15,000 foreigners of Asian origin living illegally in Papua New Guinea (*Post Courier*, 5 Nov 2009). A member of the committee, MP Philip Kikala, commented that he had been informed by Philippines Ambassador Madam Shirley Ho-Vicario at a luncheon that of the 19,000 Filipinos working in the country, 16,000 were working illegally (*Post Courier*, 20 Nov 2009). The comment was greeted by wrath on

the part of the Filipino community in Papua New Guinea, who argued that it was not a factual reflection of the situation.

In November, the Parliament disbanded the bipartisan committee established to look into the anti-Asian riots, arguing that the panel had become a “tool to sabotage” the economic bilateral relations between the Philippines and Papua New Guinea. The Parliament caucus deemed that MP Jamie Maxtone-Graham was no longer fit to chair the panel (*The National*, 16 Nov 2009). Three other committee members submitted their resignations in protest over the decision.

There were also fears that the anti-Asian riots could affect the LNG project. Trade Union President Michael Malabag warned the public not to take part in riots after an anonymous e-mail was widely circulated giving the deadline of 31 December for all Asian businesses to pack up and leave the country. Malabag said that the Asian markets would play a major role in the LNG export and that a riot would reflect badly on the country (*Post Courier*, 31 Dec 2009).

On the climate change front, the cabinet made a decision in July to suspend Theo Yasaue, the executive director of the Office of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability (OCCES), pending a full-scale investigation into the operations of the office (*The National*, 1 July 2009). Yasaue was embroiled in many controversies, such as signing sample carbon-trade certificates without having any policy or legislative framework in place. The office had been set up in 2008 as a government initiative

to have an institution to take the lead on carbon trading and climate-change issues affecting the country. Weeks before the December 2009 Copenhagen meeting on climate change, the government officially announced the abolition of the Office of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, and K3.2 million was approved to be paid out to seventy former OCCES staff who would have to find new employment. The government also reportedly spent K3 million for the total cost of Papua New Guinea’s thirty-member delegation to Copenhagen (*Post Courier*, 11 Dec 2009). The functions of the OCCES are now to be handled by the Department of Environment and Conservation under Secretary Wari Iamo.

It was also reported in September that National Alliance Party Vice President James Kond received K200,000 from Australian company Carbon Planet for his part in liaising with and advising the PNG Government. After Yasaue’s suspension and eventual termination, OCCES Acting Director Wari Iamo announced that carbon-trading agreements could not be legally signed until the government has put in place an appropriate policy and legal framework (*The National*, 28 Sept 2010).

The National Court on 14 August ruled that the Kandep sitting member, National Alliance Party candidate Don Polye, had not been duly elected and that his 2007 election was void. The court found that the total number of votes subject to illegal practices exceeded the winning margin. There were incidences of hijacking of ballot boxes, stuffing ballot boxes, officials marking ballots contrary to the wishes

of the voter, complete destruction of ballot boxes, electoral officials mistakenly sending ballot boxes to incorrect locations, and manipulation of the counting of ballot papers (Butler and When 2009). Polye has been a sitting member since 2002, was the deputy prime minister from 2002–2007, and most recently served as minister for transport, civil aviation, and works.

When Polye opted not to appeal the decision of the court to prove to his family and electorate that he had been legitimately elected and had won by popular choice, a by-election took place. It was widely reported that the Kandep open electorate by-election was absolute chaos and a disaster. The security situation deteriorated to the extent that the returning officer for the by-election abandoned three of the polling areas. Counting was also moved to Goroka in the Eastern Highlands Province to be completed due to the security situation in the Kandep electorate in Enga Province. When the results of the counting were declared, Polye reclaimed his seat by a landslide victory of primary votes. Electoral Commissioner Andrew Trawen described the Kandep electorate as one of the most difficult and challenging in Papua New Guinea when he returned the writs of the election to Governor-General Sir Paulias Matane. The by-election was marred by loss of lives due to a series of violent clashes between supporters of different candidates and police, changes of counting venues, and complaints over ballot box distribution (*The National*, 18 Dec 2009).

While campaigning for the National Alliance candidate Polye, Prime Minister Somare announced that he

will bow out of politics in 2012 (*The National*, 6 Nov 2010). Sir Michael has led the National Alliance Party since its inception and plans to hand over the reins to a successor in 2012. However, there is still much uncertainty as to the leadership of the party after he retires. Sir Michael has not announced or provided a short list of potential successors, and there have ostensibly been tussles for the leadership among regional branch leaders of the party. Some have also speculated that Sir Michael's son, MP Arthur Somare, would most likely succeed his father. Others have predicted the fall of the National Alliance Party in the coming 2012 national elections if Sir Michael relinquishes the leadership role.

In early September, the country experienced one of its worst recorded catastrophes with the sudden outbreak of cholera in Morobe Province. The cholera outbreak, which was first detected in the remote district of Wasu, quickly spread to the main township of Lae and to parts of the Highlands including Madang and East Sepik provinces. The government declared a public health emergency and committed more than US\$4 million to combat the disease, but none of the funds were released in time, leaving local health authorities and nongovernmental organizations struggling to cope. Health workers have blamed the government's inaction as a contributing factor to the spread of cholera. The most affected communities were squatter settlements, where poor sanitation practices and an acute lack of access to potable water fueled the spread of the disease. Of the 1,356 cases recorded from July to December

2009, the World Health Organization reported that 608 have occurred in the provinces of Madang, 462 in Morobe, 281 in East Sepik, and 5 in the Eastern Highlands, with at least 35 confirmed deaths (IRIN 2009).

Papua New Guinea conferred the title of the “grand chief” in October on former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke. Hawke received the highest honor as a non-Papua New Guinean when he was invested with the insignia of the Grand Companion of the Order of Logohu. Hawke received his award during the Independence Anniversary Awards from the Governor-General Sir Paulias Matane at the Government House. Hawke was recognized for service to Papua New Guinea prior to and since Independence through the involvement in the establishment of the trade union movement and early national wage development (*The National*, 22 Oct 2009).

On 26 October, the National Executive Council approved three nominated seats for women in Parliament. A total of ninety-five women had submitted expressions of interest (*The National*, 20 Jan 2010). In July 2009, the three nominees for the special measures for women to be considered for appointment to Parliament were named: Enny Moaitz, Priscilla Kare, and Mary Toliman. However, there was a split among women leaders on the final nominees. National Council of Women (NCW) President Scholar Kakas argued that the prime minister should reconsider the nominees and have a NCW representative among them.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the PNG Millennium Good Governance

Organization Peter Garry criticized the government’s appointment of three women representatives as a bad precedent. He argued that he was not against women entering Parliament, but that the House itself was for leaders who had been mandated by the people. If women were to be appointed to Parliament, then youth and churches should have representation in Parliament as well (*The National*, 18 March 2009).

A number of leaders from the Highlands, namely Branch President of Simbu Women in Politics Dere Cecilia Kimagl and community leader Michael Wak, separately said that the move to nominate women was not in the best interest of the nation as these women were trying to get a “free ride” into Parliament, and suggested that the move actually treats women in Papua New Guinea cheaply. Several women from the Highlands expressed disappointment, as there were no women from the Highlands nominated (*The National*, 16 July 2009). A group of concerned women in Port Moresby supported the option put forward by the Opposition calling on Parliament to reserve twenty elected seats for women only to contest in the provinces. Their representative, Susan Nengen, said that they are not seeking free access into Parliament but that they do want women to run for public office (*The National*, 17 March 2009).

When Parliament resumed, the government on 11 November failed to produce the numbers required to pass the historic motion to have women representatives in Parliament. The Opposition, led by Sir Mekere Morauta, argued against the motion and voted against it. The motion

required a two-thirds majority of seventy-three votes in order to vote in the first women nominees (*The National*, 3 Nov 2009). Minister for Community Development Dame Carol Kidu and Prime Minister Somare, who have been vocal on the bill and have given their backing throughout the entire process, vowed to continue pushing to see women representatives in Parliament.

On 2 November, Prime Minister Somare received from Justice Maurice Sheehan the final report of the Commission of Inquiry, which had looked into financial mismanagement and corruption at the Department of Finance. A number of prominent government officials and members of Parliament were implicated in the report. Sir Michael mentioned that he would study the 800-page report and seek the endorsement of the cabinet on certain measures to enable implementation of the report's recommendations (*Business Times* 2009). Observers and the public are now waiting to see what the government will do and hope that this report will not be shelved to collect dust like previous ones.

According to the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which annually ranks countries by "the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians," Papua New Guinea has dropped three places, from 151 in 2008 to 154 in 2009 (Transparency International 2009). This implies that the perception of corruption in Papua New Guinea has worsened, a worrying trend that could cast a lot of doubt on the government's capability to manage the substantial income from the LNG project.

On 18 November, the government launched its grand forty-year plan, titled PNG Vision 2050, which projects that the country will become richer, safer, and healthier over the next four decades. Under the plan, it is expected that Papua New Guinea's real gross domestic product will grow from around K12 billion in 2010 to a whopping K200 billion by 2050, with the country's LNG project coming on stream and the implementation of land reforms. The gross domestic product per capita should have increased from around K2,000 to K13,000 in forty years. It is estimated that this is only the base case, meaning that the situation could be even better if other projects come on, and if the various sectors perform effectively under the plan (*The National*, 19 Nov 2010).

Prime Minister Somare said that Vision 2050 is a gift from the government to the people. Sir Michael added that it is the most significant instrument since the adoption of the PNG Constitution and the Eight-Point Plan in 1975 toward the improvement of Papua New Guinea's performance as a nation. PNG Vision 2050 maps out the future directions the country should take, reflecting the hopes and aspirations of the people (*The National*, 19 Nov 2010). The launch of the plan was witnessed by thousands of people in the nation's capital at the Sir John Guise Stadium.

In May, the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Ombudsman Commission proposed a constitutional amendment, which was introduced in a private member's bill by Esa'ala MP Moses Maladina. The amendment would remove the power of the Ombudsman Commission to

issue directives preventing payments from public funds to officeholders it believes are using those funds improperly. The commission, which has previously used the provision to stop members of Parliament from using public money for their own personal or political activities, expressed fears that the proposed constitutional amendment would greatly hamper its ability to enforce the Leadership Code and make it difficult to hold leaders accountable. Chief Ombudsman Chronox Manek raised concerns about both the content of the new amendment and the processes used to develop the proposals (*Post Courier*, 11 May 2009).

In the evening of 11 December, when returning home after a function, Manek survived an assassination attempt. A car abruptly pulled up behind him as he was about to enter his driveway and a gunman fired several shots, which missed the chief ombudsman's vital organs but severely injured him (*Post Courier*, 14 Dec 2009). The attempt on his life was condemned by a wide spectrum of society, terming the attack as the first of its kind in PNG history. Most people alleged that the attempt was made because of Manek's commitment to investigating and referring some prominent leaders for their corrupt activities. The police vowed to investigate and bring to justice all those responsible for the assassination attempt.

In a joint news conference in Canberra in April, Prime Minister Somare met with Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and discussed historical problems with aid delivery. During the conference Rudd mentioned that

Australian aid money to Papua New Guinea had been misspent on consultants rather than used to support teachers and health services. He said that the effectiveness of aid in Papua New Guinea must be tied to the United Nations-mandated Millennium Development Goals, so that outcomes from foreign aid spending can be measured (*The National*, 29 April 2009). In an article in *The Australian*, Professor Helen Hughes of the Centre for Independent Studies corroborated Rudd's assertion, stating that aid money is being wasted on egregiously high salaries of aid-funded advisers, and that capacity building has failed to get Pacific Islands to grow (Hughes 2010). Meanwhile, PNG Trade Union Congress General Secretary John Paska argued that all aid to Papua New Guinea must continue to remain outside the control of the PNG government, as there is currently no safety net in place to deter politicians from abusing funds.

Poverty is still a significant and growing problem despite huge development projects such as that for liquefied natural gas. Papua New Guinea has been considered as being off track in its progress toward halving poverty (AusAID 2008). According to the Pacific Economic Survey (AusAID 2009), Papua New Guinea as one of the most populous Pacific Island nations is unlikely to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, including the targets of halving poverty, achieving universal primary education, reducing child and maternal mortality by two-thirds, or improving access to safe water and sanitation.

There are high expectations for

the LNG project, and the country's economy is projected to transform significantly when the project comes into full swing. However, there is still much uncertainty in terms of the country's preparedness and capacity to deal with the demands of the project in providing the local expertise and labor, as well as accommodations, catering, and social services for the huge number of workers, both local and foreign. Much remains to be seen in terms of how the country will manage the avalanche of cash and people. With this opportunity at the country's doorstep, the onus is on the government to ensure that the people can meaningfully benefit from the LNG project. It is also timely for the government to start considering and working on institutional structures and mechanisms such as a Sovereign Wealth Fund to save the windfall from the project for future generations.

More so, the LNG project will give Papua New Guinea the capacity to take another look at its efforts in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. In the next few years, if the government prioritizes its national obligations in the right direction, it will be able to significantly reduce poverty, achieve universal primary education, reduce child and maternal mortality, and improve access to safe water and sanitation for its populace.

SOLOMON KANTHA

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED in this review are those of the author and do not represent those of his employer, the International Organization for Migration.

References

- AusAID, Australian Agency for International Development. 2008. Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific. August. http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/track_devgov.pdf
- . 2009. Pacific Economic Survey 2009: Engaging with the World. September. <http://www.pacificsurvey.org/2009/>
- Business Times*. 2009. The Business News of Papua New Guinea. Issue 88, 6–12 November.
- Butler, George, and Katherine Wheen. 2009. *Preliminary Report on Domestic Observation of the Kandep By-Election, 15–19 November 2009*. Port Moresby: Transparency International PNG.
- Hughes, Helen. 2010. Army of Well-paid Advisers Keep Pacific Poor. *The Australian Online*, 22 February. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/army-of-well-paid-advisers-keep-pacific-poor/story-6frg6zo-1225832749197> [accessed January 2010]
- IRIN, Integrated Regional Information Network. 2009. Papua New Guinea: Government “Inaction” Fuels Cholera Spread. 15 December. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87432> [accessed January 2010]
- Kantha, Solomon. 2009. Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2008: Papua New Guinea. *The Contemporary Pacific* 21:364–373.
- Murphy, Mathew. 2009. PNG Landowners Receive \$9.5bn. *The Age*, 26 May. <http://www.theage.com.au/business/png-landowners-to-receive-95bn-20090525-bkuf.html> [accessed January 2010]
- The National*. Daily. Port Moresby. <http://www.thenational.com.pg>
- Post Courier*. Daily. Port Moresby. <http://www.postcourier.com.pg>

Sunday Chronicle. Weekly. Port Moresby. <http://www.sunday-chronicle.com>

Transparency International. 2009. Corruption Perceptions Index 2009. http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table [accessed February 2010]

World Bank. 2009. *Transforming the Rebound into Recovery*. East Asia and Pacific Update, November. Washington DC: World Bank.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islands survived 2009 reasonably peacefully, with several challenges and achievements. As in 2008, citizens continued to call for decisive and visionary leadership throughout the year. Major issues that warrant some coverage in this review include the Fee Free Education policy; the continuation and conclusion of former Solomon Islands Attorney General Julian Moti's child sex case; 2009 entitlements for members of Parliament; workers' strikes (or their intentions for industrial action); by-elections; ministerial reshuffles and election of the new governor-general; the ongoing tug-of-war on the Political Parties Integrity Bill; double standards used by the Solomon Islands government in regional and international politics; lawlessness; and central-provincial government collaborations. By the end of 2009, the focus was once again on national elections scheduled to take place around August 2010.

The Coalition for National Unity and Rural Advancement (CNURA) government in late 2008 adopted the Fee Free Education policy. This

was launched and implemented in 2009 despite a number of cautions. For instance, the premier of Choiseul province, Jackson Kiloe, warned that the policy could promote more dependency on aid, as donors were requested to foot the bill (STO, 2 Jan 2009). The implementation of this policy as a priority was reflected in the cabinet's approval of the largest sector budget in 2009, with a 24 percent increase in the recurrent budget and 12 percent decrease in the development budget compared to 2008 (MEHRD 2009, 3). New Zealand Aid (NZAid) and the Republic of China (ROC) provided additional funds to implement the policy. By June 2009, the prime minister acknowledged that the policy had problems, and again in September he admitted that the Fee Free Education policy was challenging, although it relieved the burden on parents and guardians. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) revealed that a major drawback of the policy was that it led to the misunderstanding that parents were no longer required to contribute toward school expenses (MEHRD 2009, 44). Moreover, the sustainability of funds for this bold move by government has yet to be determined, although S1\$66 million was allocated for it in 2010 (STO, 18 Jan 2009). (S1\$1 equals approximately US\$8.33.)

The Julian Moti case continued to be featured in political commentaries throughout 2009. With the toppling of the Grand Coalition for Change (GCC) government, the installation of CNURA government, and Moti's eventual deportation to face child sex charges in Australia, the issue has not

really disappeared from political commentaries. However, the deportation has tremendously improved relations between Australia and Solomon Islands. In late August 2009, Moti filed a summary of grounds to support his application for a permanent stay of proceedings with the Queensland Supreme Court. One point Moti insisted on, among others, was the allegation that the Australian government did not want him to play any part in the governing of Solomon Islands. Moti's lawyers referred to the payment of S\$1.2 million to witnesses over a two-year period and a SMS (short message service) text sent by a witness to an Australian federal agent as evidence. In the SMS text, a female witness indicated that if her conditions were not met, then she was being "used as a tool by the Australian government for political and neocolonial reasons" (SSN, 22 Aug 2009). Moti's defense lawyers also insisted that the Australian government had assisted the CNURA government to unlawfully return him to face charges in Australia (SSN, 27 Aug 2009).

Late in September, the Queensland Supreme Court heard that witnesses to Moti's case called by counsel had been threatened with termination from employment if they gave evidence (ISN, 22 Sept 2009). The Solomon Islands leader of the Opposition reacted to this and called on the police commissioner and the CNURA government not to meddle with Moti's case. He claimed, "What's happening is not right and this is probably done right under the nose of the Police Commissioner and I would like to call on him to seriously look at this allegation and to ensure that officers involved in carrying out the deportation of

Moti give their evidence without any influence" (SSN, 24 Sept 2009). After a long battle in the Queensland Supreme Court, child sex charges against Moti were dropped on 15 December 2009. Justice Debbie Mullins ruled that the Australian Federal Police payments to witnesses constituted an "abuse of process" (SSN, 17 Dec 2009). The Moti case led to the downfall of the Manasseh Sogavare regime, and it has continued to haunt the Solomon Islands government to this day. In the meantime Moti is out of the way, but the issue may pop up again in 2010 politics. Whatever happens, one thing is clear: Moti entered Solomon Islands illegally, and he was probably shown the exit the same way.

By mid 2009, a highly contentious issue came to light when the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission (PEC) recommended exorbitant entitlements to members of Parliament (MPs) and their spouses. The controversial awards appeared in an Extraordinary Gazette published on 6 July and backdated to 1 April 2009. A particular recommendation to award S\$50,000 to MP spouses at the end of four years was heavily criticized, as it would add up to S\$2.5 million (SSN, 14 July 2009). The total amount to be met by the government in these entitlements would be around S\$20 million dollars, at a time when most economies around the world were going through a recession. Immediately after the announcement of these awards, Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI) slammed the increases. Commending the overwhelming condemnation of the PEC actions, Transparency Solomon Islands stated: "The increase in terminal grants would cost the country S\$20 million dollars. There is

absolutely no good reason for paying such payments” (*SSN*, 22 July 2009). Under the new awards, the prime minister would receive a taxpayer-funded new house and a car when he leaves office, plus free gas, electricity, and water bills. Ex-gratia payments for each consecutive MP term were also increased from S1\$25,000 to S1\$100,000 (*SSN*, 23 July 2009). Interestingly, Minister for Finance the Honorable Snyder Rini, and another sitting member, the Honorable Francis Zama, chair of the Public Accounts Committee, are PEC members; former MP Danny Philips was the interim PEC chair (*SSN*, 29 July 2009). The independence of the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission in recommending these awards was therefore severely compromised.

The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industries (SICCI) and Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions (SICTU) issued a joint statement on 10 August pleading for the entitlements to be scrapped. The statement noted, “The SICCI and SICTU are in full agreement that the increases in entitlements are unjustifiable, in the context of current economic and budgetary crises” (*NEN*, 12 Aug 2009). In addition, civil society organizations under the umbrella of Development Services Exchange denounced the awards, stating: “It is sad to note that our Parliamentarian[s], who [are] suppose[d] to make decisions to . . . [move the] country forward[,] [seem] to be pulling this country down” (*SSN*, 14 Aug 2009). A whole cross-section of the country felt betrayed by what seemed to be Parliamentarians giving themselves and their families more monetary benefits.

Parliament itself was divided on

the issue. The prime minister and his cabinet distanced themselves from the awards and blamed the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission for the decision. During a public forum on 19 August, the minister for education agreed that the entitlements were wrong. But the public was uneasy with government silence over the issue and, with numerous complaints in the local media, the government had to act or be seen as moving to address their concerns. The prime minister’s office subsequently directed the attorney general to seek a high court declaration on whether or not the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission acted within the constitution when setting these awards (*SSN*, 25 Aug 2009). Meanwhile, mixed messages were coming from Parliament, with signs of a rift slowly emerging in reaction to the prime minister’s request. Certain members wanted him to follow the cabinet decision, that is, to review just three of the 2009 entitlements: “the [S1]\$50,000 grants to be paid to spouses of MPs every four years; the [S1]\$400,000 gratuity for MPs leaving parliament and the new retirement package for the prime minister” (*SSN*, 16 Sept 2009). Only one minister of the Crown came out publicly to forfeit awards that he and his spouse would have received under the 2009 Parliament Entitlement Regulations. The Honorable Steve Abana stated, “I walked into Parliament empty handed, so I should return empty handed as well” (*SSN*, 14 Sept 2009). With all the debates and the attorney general’s application, the case went before the country’s high court. On Thursday, 22 October 2009, the high court quashed the awards. In his ruling Justice Albert Palmer stated, “In view of the blatant

errors committed in the decision making process, the only proper thing to do in the circumstances is to order that they be quashed with immediate effect” (SSN, 23 Oct 2009). This finally laid the issue of entitlements to rest, at least for the moment, with new members appointed to the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission.

The high court ruling on the PEC decision triggered the Solomon Islands National Teachers Union (SINTA) and Solomon Islands Public Employees Union (SIPEU) to launch threats and notices for strike action. It gave them the impetus to ask for salary increases, as wages had remained static despite increasing costs of living. The public employees union issued a twenty-eight-day strike notice to the cabinet on 24 July. The union demanded housing entitlement awards, and, for 2009, allowances and awards, border claims, tsunami *ex-gratia* payments, and a variable cost of living adjustment (COLA), which was pitched at 66 percent (SSN, 4 Aug 2009). Likewise, the teachers’ union submitted a two-week strike notice to the government on 10 August for an 18.01 percent COLA salary increase (SSN, 11 Aug 2009). The teachers’ union submissions were outstanding issues but, due to the financial crises, they had not been taken up earlier. The PEC decision left them with no option but to pressure the government to address them or have the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission revoke the gazette awards for members of Parliament. These disputes dragged on for several months, and SIPEU claims are being referred to the Trade Disputes Panel, meaning that public officers must return to work and await a decision from the panel. The teachers’ union successfully

negotiated a 9.5 percent COLA award payment. The 4.5 percent payment was backdated to January 2009, and an additional 5 percent increase was to be paid starting 1 January 2010 (SSN, 26 Oct 2009). With the current and expected salary increases, the government will spend 30 percent of the total budget on salaries in 2010.

During 2009 two former convicted members of Parliament, who recently served their jail sentences, regained their seats in by-elections. A new governor-general was also elected, and some ministers were reshuffled or relieved of their portfolios. Peter Shannel, member for Central Guadalcanal, and Sir Allan Kemakeza, member for Savo/Russel, both served prison terms, having been found guilty of various crimes in 2008. Shannel was convicted for carrying a dangerous weapon in a restricted area in July 2008, while Kemakeza was found guilty of demanding money with menace, intimidation, and larceny in September 2008. Both vacated their parliamentary seats after sentencing. In 2009, they both contested by-elections and were duly reelected—Shannel in May and Kemakeza in October. The legality of Sir Allan’s reelection while he was on suspended sentence is still before the courts. For Shannel, once convicted he lost his seat as well as his position as head of the Independent Group in Parliament. Isaac Inoke, the member for West Honiara, was therefore appointed to head the Independent Group of Parliament starting in 2009.

There were also several ministerial reshuffles during the year. According to Prime Minister Dr Derek Sikua, such reshuffles were made “in view of the need to speed up implementation

of various government programmes and projects in the ministries concerned” (STO, 6 May 2009). Three ministers—Edward Hunuehu, Toswell Kaua, and Martin Maga—were also relieved of their portfolios on medical grounds. In addition, a new governor-general, Frank Kabui, was elected in June to replace Sir Nathaniel Waena, who had served a five-year term. Prior to his election, Kabui was the president of the Solomon Islands Bar Association and was once the attorney general of the country. He officially took over the helm on 7 July 2009. He received his knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II of England at Buckingham Palace in November 2009.

A number of high-level consultations focusing on important legislation were also carried out throughout the year. The Foreign Relations Committee held public hearings on the work of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and the partnership it has with the Solomon Islands government (STO, 13 Nov 2009). A report on this was submitted to Parliament for its deliberations. Another consultation was that of the Constitution Congress (CC) and Eminent Persons Advisory Council (EPAC), two groups established to oversee the development of the draft federal constitution of Solomon Islands. The two bodies deliberated and reviewed the first draft of the federal constitution, concluding the task on 26 June (NEN, 1 July 2009). Members will bring the reviewed first draft to all provinces in 2010 before finalizing it for Parliament’s consideration. These are both works in progress that will carry over into 2010.

A piece of legislation that brought much debate and political commen-

tary throughout the year is the Political Parties Integrity Bill 2009. This bill is aimed at controlling and limiting the movement of members of Parliament from one political party to another, that is, “crossing the floor.” The intentions behind the bill are no doubt noble, as the country’s political history has recorded only one government serving the entire term (2001–2005). However, the introduction of the bill to Parliament was complicated by opposition from academics, lawyers, and certain members of Parliament. Three Australian political commentators, for instance, argued that this piece of legislation could make way for the creation of a dictatorial regime such as that experienced in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and elsewhere. They advised that laws against floor crossing sometimes “have been introduced in the hope of consolidating one political faction but have ended up strengthening another” (Fraenkel and others 2008, 3). They argued that such legislation affords limited leeway to remove unpopular leaders. A local lawyer, Andrew Nori, shared similar sentiments, arguing that certain provisions of the bill would pave the way for corruption (STO, 11 Nov 2009). The government paid little attention to this advice, hoping to push the bill through Parliament. A group of parliamentarians led by North New Georgia MP Peter Boyers opposed the quick introduction of this bill in the November sitting of Parliament. Since it is a constitutional amendment, it will require approval by two-thirds of members to become law. With the likelihood that the bill will not secure the required number of votes, the prime minister withdrew it before Parliament retired for the 2009 Christmas break.

A committee has been appointed since then to review and amend the bill before it is re-tabled in Parliament in 2010.

On the regional and international front, Solomon Islands continues to engage with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and partners under the RAMSI arrangement. The Solomon Islands government undoubtedly requires RAMSI assistance in its efforts toward peace and security. The review of the partnership in 2009 was a move to strengthen this. In the case of Fiji's status in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Solomon Islands employed a double standard. On the one hand, as a PIF member, Solomon Islands agreed to a decision to suspend Fiji from the organization, in which Australia and New Zealand were powerful members. On the other hand, as a member of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the Solomon Islands government approach was more lenient, conveying the impression that things are normal in Fiji. Solomon Islands seemed to be signaling two contradictory messages on the same issue—a notable character of Solomon Islands politics in 2009.

A similar attitude can be seen in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States and their relationships with countries such as Cuba and Iran. The explanation in this case points to a foreign policy of “friends to all and enemies to none.” In normal terms, RAMSI was the Australian and New Zealand response to the United States' war on terror. RAMSI was created after Solomon Islands was termed a “fragile” and “failing” state in the wake of the social tensions of 1998. While acknowledging the importance of the RAMSI partnership in maintain-

ing law, order, and governance, the Solomon Islands government has gone ahead and strengthened ties with Cuba and Iran—countries from the other extreme of the political spectrum.

Cuban doctors are now serving in the country's health ministry, and more Solomon Islands students are currently studying medicine in Cuba, with Iran covering the students' airfares. In November, money sent from Tehran into the ANZ Bank in Honiara for the airfares of twenty-five students to Cuba was returned via the Commonwealth Bank in Australia allegedly for “political reasons” (*SSN*, 17 Nov 2009). After much media speculation on the role of United States on this issue, the US ambassador to Solomon Islands denied any American involvement with the Iran aid. He nevertheless stressed that “if the government of Solomon Islands wants to do business with Iran or Cuba, it's their business, but we prefer they do not do business with them” (*SSN*, 19 Nov 2009). Once again, Solomon Islands sent signals of having two tongues when it comes to regional and international politics. The relationships with Cuba and Iran are ongoing, and with Israel's appointment of a consulate in Honiara and several visits of Israeli officials in recent years, the situation is sure to be an issue for 2010 and beyond.

Toward the end of 2009, Solomon Islands' relationship with the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan) was also tested. Since the 1980s, Solomon Islands has had diplomatic relations with the Republic of China and not with the People's Republic of China (PRC, Mainland China). For this reason, Taiwan has been pumping money into the coffers of the Solomon

Islands government. Taiwan is the sole financier of the popular Rural Constituency Development Fund, a discretionary fund for all members of Parliament to use for their constituencies. When added to the Millennium Development Funds and Rural Livelihood Fund, these discretionary funds amount to S\$8 million per member per four-year term. Throughout the year, constituents quizzed their members in the media about where such funds were directed. Allegations of misuse and vote buying with such funds were visible in the opinion columns of newspapers throughout 2009. An interesting conversation emerged in late 2009 when Guadalcanal Province signed a fisheries deal with the Guandong Province of Mainland China. The Taiwanese ambassador in Honiara reacted angrily, saying, “Guadalcanal Premier Stephen Panga is a leader who cannot be trusted” (SSN, 17 Dec 2009). In response, the premier claimed that his government had simply revived a long-established relationship with Guandong Province. It was alleged that the provincial premier was reacting to ROC provision of funding for members of Parliament with little attention to provinces. Once again there was discontinuity in Solomon Islands politics, here between local and national levels.

For provincial leaders, 2009 was seen as one of neglect and disregard by the national government (SSN, 1 Oct 2009). For instance, the Malaita Province premier, the Honorable Richard N Irosaea, called on the government to fast-track development projects on Malaita, including the Auluta Oil Palm Project, the Bina Harbour Industrial site, and Suava

Bay Fisheries facility. Irosaea observed that “while the Government had been giving budgetary support to the three projects, it appeared to be almost ad hoc with no clear specific goals” (STO, 15 Aug 2009). On Guadalcanal, the premier asked the government not to expand the Honiara city boundary and to apply heavy penalties to land trespassers (SSN, 6 Nov 2009). These issues were contained in the Townsville Peace Agreement, which had put an end to militia activities in 2001, but to date, the government was not doing enough to address them. Overall, premiers were unhappy with the national government’s attitude toward the provinces in 2009. The CNURA government has responded by setting up a new body to pursue the premiers’ resolutions (SSN, 7 Oct 2009). Whether this will improve the relationship between these two levels of government in 2010 is yet to be seen.

In the area of peace-building efforts, major factions within the former Malaita Eagle Force and the Isatabu Freedom Movement have moved toward reconciliation. Following a Wind of Change conference in May, former Guadalcanal militants pledge to pursue peace (SSN, 12 May 2009). Likewise, former Malaita militants and the former Malaitan government reconciled their differences in August (SSN, 20 Aug 2009). It is important to mention here that Solomon Islanders also witnessed the launching of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in late April (SIBC, 29 April 2009). This launch was performed by Bishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of South Africa. Although the TRC work was delayed

in 2009, it is highly likely that it will commence its work in 2010.

Despite these positive moves, law and order remained a problem even with RAMSI's presence. Group crimes and thugs continued to cause problems and riots in Honiara despite the Solomon Islands Police Force's assurances early in April that it was now equipped for unrest (*SSN*, 8 April 2009). A notable criminal event in 2009 was the robbing of the police commissioner's residence in October by ten masked men (*SSN*, 1 Oct 2009). In November, a riot broke out in Honiara after Malaitan fans were not happy with a referee's decision during the Solomon Islands Cup soccer tournament. The Solomon Islands Football Federation office was burned to the ground, destroying all equipment, files, and valuables (*NEN*, 20 Nov 2009). This took place despite RAMSI and Solomon Islands Police presence at that time. It is no wonder that two prominent members of Parliament expressed fears over the possibility of another period of tension if the underlying problems facing the country are not properly addressed (*SSN*, 9 Dec 2009).

As 2009 ended, two exciting developments loom on the horizon: the opening of the telecommunications market, and the 2010 national general elections. In early December, the local telecommunications market was reopened for competition after Solomon Telekom received a new license, ending its fifteen-year monopoly over telecommunications in the country (*SSN*, 8 Dec 2009). A few days after that, a new mobile license was granted to Bemobile Solomon Islands, which was selected over two other applicants, Digidel and Milestone Developments. The company planned to cover

80 percent of the country in its first twenty-one months of operations. This was backed by a S1\$10 million performance bond (*SSN*, 19 Dec 2009). In early 2010, Bemobile's chief executive officer, Julien Coustaury, said that "we want to send a message to the Solomon Islands. You can count on us" (*SSN*, 14 Jan 2010). Indeed, this is an exciting development that Solomon Islanders look forward to in 2010.

The 2010 national elections are forthcoming, and the current focus is on who should be elected into the next house. New political parties have formed and old ones have reemerged in anticipation of the elections. Individual politicians and likely candidates are once again making promises to entice would-be voters. As this report was being finalized, voter registration was well under way. A new political party known as OUR Party launched its political platform on 17 January 2010 under the leadership of the Honorable Manasseh Sogavare and the Honorable Patterson Oti. Several other political parties, including the Peace, Oneness and Prosperity Party, claiming to represent women, are preparing to launch in early 2010. No doubt, Solomon Islands is in for another interesting national election. A year from now, we will be in a better position to comment on the programs and activities of a new government. Solomon Islands may be in need of leadership that is radical enough to exert change while at the same time attentive enough to listen to internal and external advice. Without this, Solomon Islands will continue with the kind of politics it had entertained for the past thirty-one years.

GORDON LEUA NANAU

References

Fraenkel, Jonathan, Anthony Reagan, and David Hegarty. 2008. *The Dangers of Political Party Strengthening Legislation in Solomon Islands*. State Society and Society in Melanesia Working Paper (SSGM) 2008/2. Canberra: SSGM, The Australian National University.

ISN, *Island Sun News*. Daily newspaper, Honiara.

MEHRD, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. 2009. Semi-annual Report, January–July. MEHRD: Honiara.

NEN, *National Express News*. Tri-weekly newspaper, Honiara.

SIBC, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation. Daily Internet news service, Honiara. <http://www.sibconline.com>

SSN, *Solomon Star News*. Daily newspaper, Honiara. Online at <http://solomonstarnews.com/>

STO, Solomon Times Online. Daily Internet news service, Honiara. <http://www.solomontimes.com>

VANUATU

2008 was an active year in politics for Vanuatu on a number of levels. Vanuatu national elections were held in September, followed in December by provincial council elections in Penama, Malampa, Shefa, and Tafea, which served to consolidate the power gained by various parties in the national elections. Municipalities, which have been the subject of various allegations of mismanagement over the past few years, continued to be controversial. The country also had to deal with significant governance issues relating to rising crime levels and difficulties in

controlling prisoners. Issues of economic policy also created challenges with Vanuatu's financial services sector coming under increasing pressure, the rising cost of living being felt quite strongly, and a proposed increase to employment conditions creating uncertainty within the private sector.

Ham Lini's National United Party (NUP)-led coalition had taken over in December 2004, following a successful vote of no confidence against the government coalition led by Serge Vohor's Union of Moderate Parties (UMP), which had been elected only five months earlier. Although several reshuffles took place in the intervening years, Lini's ability to survive to the end of Parliament's four-year term was remarkable. The previous decade had seen regular votes of no confidence and numerous threats of such votes leading to nine different coalition governments and two snap elections. Lini was able to stay in power mainly because he refused to take action (ie, hold accountable politicians who were members of the coalition accused of mismanagement, corruption, or misbehavior) or make decisions that could jeopardize the coalition. Maintaining political stability was his prime objective.

In the lead-up to the national election on 2 September 2008, some of the loudest voices were urging the public to vote for change—to elect a new, younger group of politicians as the best way to bring about the transformation of Vanuatu politics. As is usually the case in Vanuatu, voter turnout was high—70.4 percent of registered voters cast their ballots. Considering the fact that voting is not compulsory, the regularly high turnout indicates that democratic practices

have taken root in Vanuatu, although all is not perfect. In several constituencies there were accusations of bribery, which unfortunately has also become standard in Vanuatu elections. A total of seven successful candidates had their elections overturned by the courts, leading to by-elections on Epi, Tanna, and Efate. There was also confusion with regard to electoral rolls, including reported cases of voters' names not having been recorded. However, overall, the voting went off smoothly.

Counting of votes for Vanuatu's fifty-two members of Parliament proceeded quickly, with unofficial results for most constituencies available within several days. Early results in the Port Vila constituency showing almost certain victory for independent candidate Ralph Regenvanu seemed to indicate that the voters had indeed had *inaf* ("enough" in Bislama, the local pidgin), as proclaimed on Regenvanu's campaign T-shirts. He went on to win with the largest number of votes (1,710) received by any candidate in the electoral history of Vanuatu—10.8 percent of the votes in the Port Vila constituency. Although two long-serving members of Parliament were defeated—Barak Sope, leader of the Melanesian Progressive Party (MPP), representing Efate, and Willie Jimmy (NUP), representing Port Vila—it was soon clear that instead of the wholesale ousting of the old guard as trumpeted by the candidates who had campaigned for change, the result of the voting was just the opposite. A total of thirty sitting members of Parliament (58 percent) were returned—the highest number ever in an election.

Only two women were elected from

among the seventeen who contested the election. However, one from the island of Epi lost her seat in a court challenge in which she was accused of treating (extending favorable treatment to someone) and a male was returned in a by-election later in the year.

In addition to the problem of differentiating between the custom practice of rewarding one's supporters and outright bribery, the results of the election revealed that several disturbing trends from past elections continued or worsened. Most significant was the ever-increasing number of parties and independents who chose to contest the election—a trend that began in the late 1980s and 1990s as the major political parties began to fragment, leading to the current era of coalition governments. The number of parties reached an all-time high in the 2008 election with twenty-eight contesting in varying numbers in Vanuatu's seventeen electoral constituencies. In addition, the 2008 election saw the highest number of independents ever to contest an election—89 out of the total of 345 candidates.

Another aspect of the election process that had not changed was the difficulty faced by politicians in 2008 in forming a viable coalition out of the fifteen separate political parties and four independents who had won seats—the direct result of the problem of too many parties and independents. None of the parties had the commanding numbers required to anchor a solid alliance. Indeed, even two of the larger parties together did not provide a solid majority, and thus politicians found themselves competing for the individual elected members of the smaller parties and independents.

Following the counting of votes and intense maneuvering among the major parties, involving accusations of “member stealing” and exchange of large sums of money to secure support, a coalition between the Vanua‘aku Pati (VP), led by Edward Natapei, and the National United Party, led by former Prime Minister Ham Lini, emerged to form the government after Parliament’s first meeting on 22 September. With a slim 27 to 25-seat majority in the country’s 52-seat Parliament, and intense rage among opposition members who had expected until the last minute to form the majority, the viability of the government appeared to be at risk.

Indeed, several days later the new Opposition, headed by the president of the Vanuatu Republican Party (VRP) and former minister of lands in the previous government, Maxime Carlot Korman, tabled a motion of no confidence in the new VP/NUP coalition. However, in a surprise move—or not so surprising, depending on one’s reading of Vanuatu’s political history—UMP leader Serge Vohor decided at the last minute to shift allegiance and joined the VP/NUP alliance, defeating the no-confidence motion on 3 October, claiming he did so to ensure political stability in the country. With the strength provided by three major parties—the VP/NUP/UMP together controlled twenty-six members—the Honorable Edward Natapei, leader of the Vanua‘aku Pati, was reconfirmed as prime minister.

But the political chaos was not over. Incensed by the reallocation of ministerial portfolios required to accommodate the Union of Moderate Parties, three members of Natapei’s

Vanua‘aku Pati and one from the National United Party who had missed out revolted and joined with the Opposition to table another motion of no confidence. In the vote that took place on 26 November 2008, three of the rebel members of Parliament plus several other independents returned to support the government coalition, allowing it to survive once again.

In an attempt to demonstrate the strength of the new government coalition following its chaotic birth after the September 2008 election, the three major parties (VP, NUP, and UMP) and various smaller parties (Labor Party, Nagriamel Movement, MPP, and People’s Progressive Party [PPP]) signed a new memorandum of understanding in early January 2009. This preceded the launching of a document laying out the government’s new, four-year policy direction. Prime Minister Natapei announced that, as under his predecessor and now deputy prime minister, Ham Lini, the new government would focus on maintaining political stability within the coalition in order to survive in power and achieve its goals (*VDP*, 2 Feb 2009).

At the same time, the Opposition came together (VRP, PPP, and Green Confederation) supporting Maxime Carlot Korman as leader and, later, PPP President Sato Kilman (*VDP*, 2 March 2009). Surprising to many was the decision of newly elected independent MP Ralph Regenvanu to ally with the Opposition, since he had been openly critical of its leader during the election campaign vowing never to join forces with him. Regenvanu most likely would have said that while he did not support Korman, he was opposed to all of the major parties and

preferred not to join them in the government. Instead, he has joined with the smaller parties—Green Confederation led by Moana Carcasses, the People’s Progressive Party led by Sato Kilman, and others—to form what is known as the Alliance.

To demonstrate their solidarity, the government coalition partners decided to run a single candidate in the Epi by-election, agreeing to back Leinavao Tasso, the successful VP candidate in the national election who had had her MP title stripped by a court challenge that her associates had been guilty of treating (*VDP*, 2 Jan 2009). What should have been an easy victory, however, failed to materialize. The election was won by independent candidate Ioan Simon, demonstrating that constituents in Vanuatu cannot always be counted on to follow blindly the decisions of their leaders in far-off Port Vila (*VDP*, 9 Feb 2009). The by-election for Tanna took place in early March, and four for Efate in August (all four seats had been declared vacant in a court challenge). It took eleven months to finalize the election—an unacceptable delay by any standard.

While the coalition remained intact, tensions within the National United Party began to increase over the failure of the party president, Ham Lini, to discipline Minister for Vanuatu Business James Bule (*NUP*) over alleged corruption. Three *NUP* members of Parliament, including Speaker George Wells, were expelled from the party and joined the Opposition. Sensing a chance to unseat the government, the Opposition tabled a vote of no confidence in June (*VDP*, 9 June 2009). Natapei negotiated a

reshuffle, bringing several members of the Vanuatu Republican Party into the coalition—its president, Maxime Carlot Korman, replaced Wells as Speaker. Serge Vohor, *UMP* president, gave up a ministry to accommodate one of the VP backbenchers who had failed to get a portfolio when the government was first formed and sided with the Opposition (*VDP*, 11 June, 12 June 2009). The announcement by the court a few days later that the elections of the four Efate members were void, costing the government three seats, encouraged the Opposition in their challenge of the government. But the government’s temporary loss in numbers was not enough, and the vote of no confidence on 16 June failed (*VDP*, 16 June 2009). However, other political events that took place during the second half of 2009 would demonstrate that the coalition was still vulnerable.

In August, the five-year term of President Kalkot Matas Kelekele came to an end. As a practicing lawyer and former Supreme Court judge, he had fulfilled his duties without incident but alienated some politicians by advocating substantial constitutional reform. For example, he favored replacing Vanuatu’s Westminster form of government with a presidential system, as a way to deal with the political instability Vanuatu had experienced during the previous decade. In total, there were eleven candidates: the National United Party backed the reelection of the president (who, it should be noted, is married to Ham Lini’s sister); the Vanua’aku Pati supported two candidates, veteran politicians Kalo Nial from Santo and Iolu Johnson Abbil from Tanna; the Union of Moderate Parties proclaimed it was time for

a woman to become president and nominated long-time supporter and women's advocate Yvette Sam; and the Alliance supported former UMP President Vincent Boulekone. The Vanuatu Republican Party did not nominate a candidate. The Electoral College, which consists of all fifty-two members of Parliament plus the presidents of the six Provincial Councils, took two days to come to a decision. After several ballots—the vote is secret—support began to shift. Rumor had it that the Vanuatu Republican Party supported the NUP nomination, while the Alliance and the Union of Moderate Parties fell in behind the Vanua'aku Pati, giving the victory to Iollu Johnson Abbil, who won 42 votes in the last round to 16 for the incumbent, Kalkot Matas Kelekele (VDP, 2 Sept, 3 Sept 2009).

The election of a new Port Vila municipal government would also test the ability of the coalition to work together. All the major parties fielded candidates for the 14 councillor positions with the Alliance and Vanua'aku Pati each winning 4, the National United Party 3, the Union of Moderate Parties 2, and the Vanuatu Republican Party 1 (VDP, 6 Nov 2009). Negotiations within the coalition soon reached an impasse: the Vanua'aku Pati expected to hold the top position of lord mayor, but the four newly elected councillors could not agree between themselves. In the end, the leaders of the parties had to meet to negotiate and agreed to a formula to allocate the positions—the Alliance was given the position of lord mayor, and the Vanua'aku Pati got the positions of deputy mayor and town clerk. The Union of Moderate Parties and the

Vanuatu Republican Party were also allocated positions, but, significantly, the National United Party was not involved in the negotiations and was totally excluded (VDP, 19 Nov 2009).

The position of the National United Party within the coalition had become an issue several months earlier with the announcement by the Reserve Bank that so-called custom currencies—*livatu* and *selmane* (shell money)—could not be used as national custom currencies, nor could they be used interchangeably with the *vatu* currency. The use of custom currencies has been gaining greater prominence since the development of the “National Self Reliance Strategy 2020,” which was supported by the government through its decision to designate both 2007 and 2008 as a “Year of the Traditional Economy.” The particular issue that the Reserve Bank was responding to arose from a request by the Vanuatu Indigenous Peoples' Forum, which is associated with an organization based in the northeast of the island of Pentecost known as the Melanesian Institute of Science, Philosophy, Humanity and Technology, founded in 1997 by the late president, Father Walter Lini. Its aim is to promote the development model of the Turaga Nation, as the supporters of the institution call their movement—Raga is the indigenous name for the island of Pentecost. The common term used for this development model is “custom economy,” which Turaga supporters claim (and is generally accepted) sustains the 80 percent of the people of Vanuatu who reside in rural areas. Essential parts of the system were the establishment of Tanbunia custom bank

and Tanmarahi reserve system, the valuing of indigenous currencies, and the 1998 declaration of a pig tusk as the highest valued custom currency in Vanuatu. The Vanuatu Indigenous Peoples' Forum was planning for the Declaration of Custom Economic Independence and had requested the Government of Vanuatu to recognize the custom currencies and provide a donation in Vanuatu *vatu* of the cash equivalent that had been deposited in Tanbunia for the celebration—20,000 *livatu* or 360 million *vatu* (*VDP*, 15 Aug 2009). (100 *vatu* equals approximately US\$1.00.)

Despite the negative position taken by the Reserve Bank, the Council of Ministers had, in fact, agreed to make a contribution based on a proposal presented to it by Deputy Prime Minister Ham Lini (*NUP*)—brother of the late Father Walter Lini and of Hilda Lini, one of the leaders in the Turanga Movement. This was done, however, without the presence of Minister of Finance Sela Molisa (*VP*), who was away at the time and refused to sign off on the arrangement on his return. In a surprise comment, Molisa blamed the problem on the “legacy of the late Prime Minister Father Walter Lini that split the *VP* [in 1991] . . . the Prime Minister just had to remove the National United Party because it is clear the issue (custom economic independence) is still alive” (*VDP*, 21 Nov 2009). While accepting the importance of the custom economy for rural Ni-Vanuatu, Molisa is far more inclined to believe that Vanuatu's future lies in integrating into the global economy. The effect of this decision was to create a fatal rift between the National United Party

and the Vanua'aku Pati, which could be detected earlier in the presidential election and in the negotiations following the election of the new Port Vila municipal government, precipitating a reshuffle of the coalition.

Prime Minister Natapei removed the National United Party and the Vanuatu Republican Party, whose members had supported the *NUP* nominee for president, and brought in the Alliance with its fifteen associated members of Parliament. Natapei also used the opportunity to remove as minister of lands renegade *VP* member Harry Iauko, who had been brought back in the last reshuffle and had been accused of corruption over land sales. The head of the Alliance, Sato Killman (*PPP*), was made deputy prime minister and given two additional portfolios. The Union of Moderate Parties came out best—clearly a reward for the party's loyalty—acquiring two additional portfolios, for a total of four. In the last reshuffle, Serge Vohor had given up a portfolio to help facilitate the new arrangement and had supported the *VP* nominee for president. The new coalition consisted of the Vanua'aku Pati, Union of Moderate Parties, and Alliance, supported as well by various independents and several *VRP* and *NUP* members who refused to go along with their party leaders (*VDP*, 20 Nov 2009).

In a surprise move, believed by many as an attempt to protect his position as Speaker, Maxime Carlot Korman (*VRP*)—his party having just been expelled from the coalition—countered by declaring that the prime minister had vacated his seat in Parliament. Natapei was attending an overseas conference and, the Speaker

alleged, failed to get his permission to be absent from an extraordinary session scheduled at the same time. Natapei appealed to the Supreme Court, and the chief justice ruled that the Speaker's decision to unseat the prime minister was "unconstitutional and of no legal effect" (*VDP*, 7 Dec 2009). The saga continued, however, with the prime minister facing a vote of no confidence on his return on 10 December 2009, moved by the now leader of the Opposition, Ham Lini; the motion was defeated.

It was not surprising that the government reacted straight away with a motion of no confidence against Speaker Korman—the Speaker is elected by the Parliament from among its members. It was intended that the vote would take place on the same day as the vote of no confidence against the prime minister, but Korman ruled that it should be delayed for a week. Through various manipulations of standing orders, he was able to thwart three more attempts to unseat him. The issue was not resolved before the end of the parliamentary session (*VDP*, 16 Dec, 18 Dec 2009). In early January 2010, he resigned and was replaced by former Speaker George Wells.

Rising crime rates in Vila and Luganville—two murders reported on Efate and levels of theft and violence increasing—became dominant issues throughout 2008 and 2009. The escape from custody of a number of dangerous prisoners focused much of the public outcry on the failures of the Vanuatu Correctional Services Department, which had been established in 2006 when responsibility for management of prisons was transferred from

the police. By the end of June 2008, the control of the Correctional Services Department was returned to the police and an order given, permitting them to be armed during the recapture of prisoners. But this change did not improve the situation, and in December a final mass escape occurred, following the release by the prisoners of a document entitled "Prisons Report 2008: Vanuatu's Notorious Prison in Disguise" (Prisoners 2008). Vanuatu's prisons have in the past been the subject of an Amnesty International Report documenting human rights abuses (AI 1998).

On 19 December 2008, prisoners set fire to their bedding, overpowered their guards, and escaped en masse (*VDP*, 20 Dec 2008). Shortly afterward, two members of Parliament representing Port Vila—Moana Carcasses and Ralph Regenvanu, both members of the Alliance—were arrested and spent a night in jail for allegedly aiding the prisoners in their escape. For several weeks prior, both had spoken out strongly against prisoner abuse and the poor conditions of the prison, and when the mass escape took place, they organized a safe haven in the Chiefs' Nakamal (meeting house), where the prisoners could assemble and be protected from feared police violence. Carcasses and Regenvanu were charged with accessory after the fact, harboring or assisting a prisoner, and obstructing a police officer on duty. Conviction would have led to their losing their seats in Parliament and prohibition for standing again in an election for a period of ten years. The government was clearly keen to see the two Opposition members convicted, but the case against them was eventu-

ally dropped for lack of evidence in late September (*VDP*, 26 Sept 2009).

The most pressing issue faced by the new government in 2009 was how to deal with the aftermath of the prison riot. Opinion was split—little sympathy for prisoners convicted of violent crimes, but at the same time anger at the inability of the government to protect the public. The main focus of discontent was the Correctional Services, as articulated on several occasions in strongly worded comments in the *Vanuatu Daily Post* (*VDP*). The editor of the newspaper, Marc Neil-Jones, wrote a strong editorial after the prison riot calling for Acting Director of the Correctional Services Joshua Bong to step down or be suspended until the results of a government inquiry had been completed. In reaction, on Saturday, 17 January 2009, members of the Correctional Services assaulted Neil-Jones in his office, leaving him with multiple bruises and abrasions. The officers suspected of the assault have yet to be brought to justice (*VDP*, 19 Jan 2009). The appointment of a new acting director of the Correctional Services, veteran public servant Mark Bebe, began to turn things around—at least with regard to prison facilities. The New Zealand government reaffirmed its commitment to funding the construction of a new prison and gave an additional 45 million *vatu* for the refurbishing of existing facilities.

However, issues relating to the quality of policing remained unresolved. At the end of March 2009, the public was shocked to learn of the death of a prisoner, John Bule, who had escaped at the time of the prison fire, been recaptured, escaped again, and died in the hands of the police

during his recapture. According to the pathologist's report, Bule had died as the result of "extensive blunt force" having been applied to his body. A New Zealand judge on secondment to Vanuatu, Nevin Dawson, was appointed coroner to investigate the case (*VDP*, 24 April 2009). During hearings that followed, Judge Dawson expressed his concern about the lack of cooperation he was receiving from police officers involved in the case, accusing them of "making up evidence" (*VDP*, 27 Nov 2009). The appointment of Peter Bong as police commissioner—he had been suspended as acting commissioner following the attack on *Daily Post* editor Marc Neil-Jones—astounded many and raised serious questions about the willingness of authorities in the Vanuatu government to deal with the serious problem of violence within the police forces (*VDP*, 30 Sept 2009). Insuring that the rule of law applies to everyone—individual Ni-Vanuatu, politicians, and members of the security forces—is an issue that the government has yet to adequately address and will continue to be an issue in years to come.

The resurgence of the old Anglophone/Francophone rivalry, an issue thought by many to have faded away, made a surprising resurgence during 2009. At the end of January, just prior to the start of the new academic year, Minister of Education Charlot Salwai, UMP member from Pentecost and himself a Francophone, announced that he was canceling the scholarships for most of the Ni-Vanuatu Francophone students studying in Noumea at the Université de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, citing poor results due to lack of discipline and inadequate academic preparation. The minister was signal-

ing his belief that Francophones were educationally disadvantaged and announcing his commitment to bring about change in the country's education system to correct the situation. Minister of Finance Sela Molisa (VP)—an Anglophone—responded positively by getting the Council of Ministers' approval for the allocation of 101 million *vatu* of Chinese government aid money for the construction of facilities for Francophone students at the Port Vila campus of the University of the South Pacific (VDP, 10 Feb 2009).

In September, as part of the Ministry of Education's reform proposals, a new language policy was introduced that aroused significant negative response. In place of the existing dual system of education—separate English- and French-medium schools—the new policy, designed to create bilingual citizens, proposed that a single system be developed in which all students would be taught in French up to class 8 with the slow introduction of English. The argument was that since French was supposedly harder to learn than English, and because of the link between English and Vanuatu's lingua franca, Bislama, every child should first learn French. What would happen after class 8 was not clear. Since only a modest percentage of students go on to high school, the proposal appeared to many like the old French Condominium plan to transform Vanuatu (then the New Hebrides) into a French-speaking country. The impact this would have on children whose parents had chosen to have them educated in the English system led to strong criticism at several public meetings in Port Vila and around the country.

Since the Vanuatu Constitution

states clearly that “the principal languages of education are English and French” (Article 3[1]) and is silent on the issue of bilingualism, the proposed change appears to be unconstitutional. Moreover, the constitution states that “a citizen of Vanuatu may obtain, in the official language that he uses, the services which he may rightfully expect from the administration of the Republic of Vanuatu” (Article 64 [1]). Denial of the right to be educated in English would be a clear violation of the rights of the individual under the Constitution. The fact that the minister of Education is a UMP member may explain why there has been no comment from the government as a whole on this very sensitive issue; at this point there is clearly no interest on the part of the VP-led government to create instability within the coalition. It is fascinating to note that thirty years after independence, the old political rivalry created by the two colonial powers—Great Britain and France—continues to plague Vanuatu. Anglophone and Francophone politicians find it easier today to work together, but the issue of language has not been resolved and will continue to be part of the political debate for years to come.

HOWARD VAN TREASE

SPECIAL THANKS to Anita Jowitt, who contributed to the 2008 section of this review.

References

AI, Amnesty International. 1998. Vanuatu: No Safe Place for Prisoners. September. AI Index: ASA 44/01/98.

- Australian Labor's International Projects Unit. 2008. *The Political Parties and Groupings of Vanuatu*. First edition, August. Port Vila: Pacific Institute of Public Policy. http://www.ip.alp.org.au/download/now/vanuatu_2.pdf
- Morgan, Michael G. 2006. The Origins and Effects of Party Fragmentation in Vanuatu. In *Political Parties in the Pacific Islands*, edited by Roland Rich, 117-142. Canberra: Pandanus Books.
- Prisoners. 2008. Prison Report 2008: Vanuatu's Notorious Prison in Disguise: The Truths Unveiling Forms of Inhumane Treatments, Deprivation of Human Rights, Denial of Basic Healthcare and the Consequences of a Failed Correctional Service. Printed and softbound 85-page manuscript. Vanuatu Collection, USP Emalus Campus Library, Vanuatu Collection, Port Vila.
- Republic of Vanuatu. 2008. Declaration by Electoral Commission of Candidates Elected in the 2008 Election. Port Vila: Vanuatu Electoral Commission.
- Van Trease, Howard. 1995. *Melanesian Politics: Stael Blong Vanuatu*. Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific. French version: *La Politique Mélanésienne: Stael Blong Vanuatu*.
- . 2005. The Operation of the Single Non-Transferable Vote System in Vanuatu. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 43 (3): 296-332.
- . 2009. Vanuatu's 2008 Election: Difficulties of Government Formation in a Fractionalized Setting. State Society and Governance in Melanesia Briefing Note 1/2009. Canberra: The Australian National University. http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/BriefingNotes/BriefingNote_Vanuatu_Election.pdf
- VDP, *Vanuatu Daily Post*. Port Vila.