

2009). A woman who gave birth to the prime minister's grandson issued a complaint when she had to pay a hospital fee of NZ\$1,000 (the rate for tourists and contract workers) instead of NZ\$26 (the fee for locals and permanent residents) (*CIN*, 29 Aug 2008). Deputy Prime Minister Maoate, in his role as minister of health, promised to look at the issue more closely (*CIN*, 30 Aug 2008). Albert Numanga, former manager of the Cook Islands Tourism office in Auckland, faced four charges of defrauding the Cook Islands government of a total of NZ\$1 million. Numanga spent over ten years working in the Cook Islands tourism sector. Numanga's former boss, Chris Wong, also faced charges of misusing government funds, including using thousands of dollars for gambling in the Auckland Sky casino (*CIN*, 11 Feb 2009).

Members of the Public Expenditure Review Committee resigned as of 1 October 2008 because of a perceived lack of support from the government. Deputy Prime Minister Maoate declared that the committee was still needed, despite the fact that much of its workload had been taken over by the audit department (*CIN*, 26 Sept 2008). The government's audit office revealed that over a million dollars of fundraising activity was going on in public schools, restating the government's concern that there was too much fundraising (*CIN*, 16 July 2008). Such reliance on private initiatives for funding underlines the conflicting priorities that continue between politicians, businesses, traditional leaders, and citizens. Overall, in the rapidly changing social environment, the country continued to spiral into an uncertain future, with depopulation

and high-profile regional-hosting commitments disguising the reality of an overburdening political structure.

Several prominent deaths during the year received national attention. The funeral of Sir Pupuke Robati, former prime minister and longtime member of Parliament for the island of Rakahanga, was held on 1 May 2009 (*CIN*, 27 April, 1 May 2009). Lawyer John McFadzien, who served as Cook Islands solicitor general from 1983 to 1995, died 13 May 2009 (*CIN*, 14 May 2009, 1). Sir Tangaroa Tangaroa, former queen's representative and member of Parliament for Tongareva, was given a state funeral service on 29 May 2009 (*CIN*, 29 May 2009). Professor Ron Crocombe passed away on 18 June 2009 (*CIN*, 19 June 2009), and the nation paid a special tribute to the great scholar (*CIN*, "Salute to Papa Ron," 26 June 2009).

The year ended, as it began, with public uncertainty in the current administration. The government received criticism when it announced a new policy of limiting heads of ministries to three terms (*CIN*, 23 June, 19 June 2009).

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FRENCH POLYNESIA

The chronic political instability that has been plaguing the country since 2004 continued, with no fewer than three different governments during the period under review. The surprising

alliance between the two former arch-enemies Oscar Temaru and Gaston Flosse broke apart almost as quickly as it had come to be. With short-term coalitions now possible between each and every political party, political ideologies seem to be increasingly irrelevant, less and less masking the opportunist ambitions of politicians for power and money.

Many important people passed away during the year under review. On 16 August 2008, former Archbishop Michel Coppenrath, the first Tahitian Catholic priest, died at age 84 (*TPM*, Sept 2008), followed on 4 November by his elder brother Gerald Coppenrath, an attorney, legal scholar, and politician who had served as French Polynesia's senator from 1958 to 1962 (*TPM*, Dec 2008). On 4 January, entrepreneur and master navigator Francis Cowan, one of the pioneers of the revival of traditional navigation in Oceania, passed away at age 82 (*TP*, 5 Jan 2009). Alexandre Léontieff, economist and former president (1987–1991), and recently appointed chairman of the Social Contingency Fund (the territorial health insurance), passed away on 2 March at age 61 after a dazzling political career. On 13 March, veteran politician Tino-mana “Milou” Ebb, former mayor of Mataiea and president of the assembly from 1994 to 1996, died at age 75 (*TPM*, April 2009).

The review period began with the arrival of the new French high commissioner, Adolphe Colrat, on 5 July, taking the place of Anne Boquet as the representative of the French government (*TPM*, Aug 2008). Boquet's term had been fraught with controversy, since her attitude toward the local

government had frequently changed from one of respect and reconciliation to one of interference, confrontation, and colonial arrogance.

In mid-July, new French Secretary for Overseas Territories Yves Jégo visited the country and urged the local government to be more accountable. While promising that the annual amount of subsidies from Paris for the country government would remain stable for 2009, he announced that the gigantic new hospital under construction in Taaone (begun under Flosse in the early 2000s) will not receive any French funding for its operation. A week later, High Commissioner Colrat announced the gradual closing down of the remaining French army and air force bases during the next few years (*TPM*, Aug 2008).

While these announcements gave rise to speculations about France's decreasing commitment to the country, local politics entered another round with the upcoming French Senate elections of 21 September. On 10 July, a common ticket was agreed to by the parties of the two historic pro-French and pro-independence leaders Gaston Flosse and Oscar Temaru—Tahoeraa Huiraatira (People's Rally) and Tavini Huiraatira (People's Servant)/Union pour la Démocratie (UPLD)—which were already forming a common caucus in the assembly under the name of Union pour le Développement, la Stabilité, et la Paix (UDSP) (*TPM*, Aug 2008). The two former arch-enemies had reconciled in July 2007 and entered into a coalition in order to fight Gaston Tong Sang, leader of To Tatou Aia (Our Homeland) coalition and president of the country since April 2008, whom they both criti-

cized as being too pro-French. Since Temaru, then Speaker of the assembly, was not interested in a senate seat, attorney Richard Tuheiava was nominated by Temaru's party as the second candidate on the common list with Flosse (*TP*, 8 Aug 2008).

Since 1999, Flosse had been the country's only representative in the French Senate on a nine-year term, in addition to his various local offices. In a reapportionment of seats, French Polynesia had received a second seat in the senate due to its increased population for the 2008 elections, while the term of office for senators was reduced to six years. French senators are elected by the so-called grand electors (ie, deputies of the National Assembly, members of regional assemblies, and delegates of municipal councils). The electoral campaign was therefore mainly limited to the municipal councilors of the forty-eight municipalities of French Polynesia, who make up a large majority of the country's 697 grand electors. Besides the Flosse-Tuheiava ticket, President Tong Sang ran as the official candidate of the French ruling party Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) on a ticket with Pirae Mayor Béatrice Copenrath-Vernaudo (*TP*, 12 Sept 2008).

Since the majority of the municipal councils were ruled by either Temaru's Tavini or Flosse's Tahoeraa parties, Flosse and Tuheiava won with 372 and 361 votes, respectively. Competing candidates Tong Sang and Copenrath-Vernaudo received only 318 and 308 votes each. Five other tickets of splinter parties received only a few or no votes at all (*TP*, 21 Sept 2008; *TPM*, Oct 2008).

The election clearly showed that, despite massive efforts by the French government in support of Tong Sang, Temaru and Flosse jointly still represented the majority. Even though Flosse had previously lost most of his ideologically pro-French voters to Tong Sang, the majority of Tahoeraa party officials, particularly mayors and councilors of rural municipalities, were still loyal to their old leader. In Flosse's case, the strategy of the new generation of French Gaullists under President Nicolas Sarkozy to neutralize controversial figures of ex-President Jacques Chirac's old guard clearly failed. "Sarkozy succeeded in bringing down Jacques Lafleur and Lucette Michaux-Chevry, but Flosse is his toughest nut to crack," commented a local observer, referring to parallel figures in New Caledonia and Guadeloupe who were recently removed from all positions of power (Tahiti resident, pers comm, 22 Dec 2008).

As Flosse was 77 at the time of his reelection but Tuheiava only 34, French Polynesia's delegation now includes not only the oldest but also the youngest of all 346 French senators. Not only did the French Gaullist UMP party no longer support Flosse, but it also openly opposed him; therefore, he refused to rejoin its caucus and now sits in the ranks of the few independent senators. Tuheiava, on the other hand, joined the caucus of the French Socialist party, following a partnership agreement between the Socialists and Temaru's Tavini Huiraatira party. As the first openly pro-independence parliamentarian to represent the country in Paris, Tuheiava promised to raise the issue of

independence in the French Senate. The first initiatives he began working on were the revision of the still legally valid political trial of historic Tahitian leader Pouvanaa a Oopa (sentenced to a long prison term and banishment in France on trumped-up charges in 1959), as well as the classification of the historic temple Marae Taputapuatea on Raiatea island as a UNESCO world heritage site (*TP*, 11 and 19 Oct 2008).

During the months following the senate election, a great controversy arose about the adjustment of pensions, leading to mass protests. Presently, all retired French civil servants resident in French Polynesia (regardless of where they worked before) receive a so-called indexation of 75 percent on top of their pensions. Considering the absence of an income tax in French Polynesia, this essentially represents a doubling of the pension amount they would receive if residing in metropolitan France. This is one of the major reasons for French pensioners to move into the country, thus increasing the French settler population but at the same time contributing to the local economy through their massive spending. The indexation has long been controversial. During a visit to Tahiti in July 2008, French Secretary for Overseas Territories Yves Jégo announced that pensions for retired civil servants whose work was not related to an overseas territory would no longer be indexed (*TPM*, Aug 2008). During another visit to the country in mid-October, Jégo announced a detailed reform plan, according to which all existing indexations will remain in place for life, but the indexation of new pensions will be

gradually cancelled by 2015 (*TPM*, Dec 2008).

The reform plans provoked vocal protests by civil servants unions, supported by local opposition politicians. Senator Flosse accused France of preparing its withdrawal from the territory and breaking previously given promises. Jégo, on the other hand, defended his reform plan as a measure of social justice. The pensioners, he argued, were a privileged class who could handle cuts in their income very well, compared to the majority of the population who work in the private sector, where they have to survive on low wages and receive only minimal social services (*TPM*, Dec 2008). Despite a huge protest march of about 5,000 public servants on 9 October, another one of 1,000 on 27 October, and a roadblock in downtown Papeete by 2,000 protestors on 12 November, the French Senate passed the pension reform law on 18 November (*TPM*, Dec 2008).

While the bureaucratic elite unsuccessfully fought to preserve their privileges, the economic situation of the country continued to deteriorate. The visitor count of 182,556 in 2008 represented another record low, 9.2 percent below the year before, bringing the number of tourists down to the level of twenty years ago. Considering the 2008 world financial crisis, these figures are likely to drop even more in 2009. The economic crisis touched other sectors as well, with notably the pearl industry and agriculture in recession. In 2008, the country imported 35 billion CFP francs (about US\$350 million) worth of agricultural products, accounting for 90 percent of the locally consumed food (*TPM*, Nov

2008, Jan 2009). On 11 June 2009, the Ministry of Finance announced that tax income for the country government would be 30 percent less than that of the preceding year (*TPM*, July 2009).

With the country's economy in serious recession, poverty is an ever-increasing problem. According to a census taken by a French researcher, there are now 321 houseless persons in the city of Papeete alone. The census did not cover the adjacent suburban municipalities, so actual figures are probably much higher (*TPM*, May 2009).

While the economy kept declining, the political instability went into another round. On 26 September, a few days after the senate elections, internal divisions within the government became apparent, as Jean-Christophe Bouissou—the leader of Rautahi (“Unity”), the second largest constituent party within the To Tatou Aia coalition, and chairman of the To Tatou Aia caucus in the assembly—publicly criticized the government for being unstable and advocated an alliance with the opposition parties in order to create a more stable majority, as To Tatou Aia at that time held only a one-seat majority over the combined opposition of UPLD and Tahoeraa (*TP*, 28 Sept 2008). Throughout the latter part of the year, the relations between Tong Sang and Bouissou deteriorated, as did those with other members of the governing coalition. On 8 December, To Tatou Aia lost its majority, as one of its assembly members, Sandra Lévy-Agami, resigned from the coalition to become an independent. The reason given for her resignation was Tong Sang's not respecting electoral

promises concerning the 2009 budget (*TP*, 8 Dec 2008). Without a majority, the government could not pass the budget and was deadlocked.

During the following two months, Tong Sang met several times with opposition leaders Temaru and Flosse in order to find a way out of the political crisis, but the negotiations failed each time to bring about substantial agreement (*DT*, 26 Dec 2008). In late January, Tong Sang was able to convince Lévy-Agami to vote in favor of the 2009 budget so that it could finally be passed (*TP*, 27 Jan 2009), but this was only a temporary move, and she refused to rejoin the ranks of To Tatou Aia in the assembly, leaving the government without a majority.

Multiple negotiations between assembly members followed until 31 January, when Temaru, Flosse, and Bouissou announced that they had formed a new governing coalition. Bouissou stated that Tong Sang had failed to pull the country out of the crisis and had contributed to the division of the political landscape instead of working for unity. Bouissou supported Temaru's candidacy for president, calling Temaru the political leader with the greatest charisma of all, who solely would be able to overcome the political division of the country (*TP*, 31 Jan 2009). This sudden change of discourse by Bouissou surprised many observers, since Bouissou had always identified himself as favorable to France and had denounced Temaru as a divisive, anti-French extremist until a few months before.

Flosse, on the other hand, was slightly angry at Temaru, whom he accused of violating the 2008 part-

nership agreement between the two parties, which promised Tahoeraa the presidency while UPLD would hold the position of Speaker. Consequently, the Tahoeraa assembly members dissolved their common caucus with UPLD, but still agreed to vote for Temaru. Flosse said he and his party had no other choice, since they all wanted to remove Tong Sang from office, but the new organic law of 2007 no longer allowed motions of no confidence but only so-called motions of defiance, which include the automatic election of a new president (*TP*, 2 Feb 2009).

On 4 February, UPLD, Tahoeraa, and Rautahi introduced a motion of defiance against Tong Sang with Temaru as their candidate. However, Tong Sang circumvented this by declaring his resignation on 7 February, thereby enabling the election of a new president in several rounds with multiple candidates (*TPM*, March 2009). Apparently, this move was an attempt to gain time and to divide the new majority.

For the presidential election on 11 February, Edouard Fritch (Flosse's son-in-law) and Sandra Lévy-Agami declared their candidacies as well, in addition to Temaru and Tong Sang. Previously, Bouissou had formed a new caucus in the assembly named *Ia Ora Te Fenua* (Let The Land Live), into which several other members deserted from *To Tatou Aia*, further weakening Tong Sang's position. In the first round, Temaru received 24 votes as expected (the 18 assembly members of UPLD, as well as 6 of *Ia Ora Te Fenua*); Tong Sang received 20 (the remaining members of *To Tatou Aia*); Fritch gathered 12 votes (those of his own caucus, including some

dissidents from *To Tatou Aia*); while Lévy-Agami received her own vote. For the second round, Lévy-Agami and Fritch withdrew their candidacies (they had already made very conciliatory speeches in the first round), and Temaru was elected the new president with 37 votes (including the 12 votes of Tahoeraa and the 1 of Lévy-Agami). One day later, the same majority elected Edouard Fritch to the position of speaker to take Temaru's place (*TP*, 11 and 12 Feb 2009).

After long negotiations among the three parties of the new coalition, Temaru presented his new cabinet on 16 February, mainly comprising former ministers from previous governments. Temaru originally wanted to nominate Bouissou to be his vice president, but Flosse refused to accept this. Finally, the coalition agreed on UPLD member Tony Geros, who had been vice president during Temaru's previous presidency from September 2007 to February 2008. The cabinet consisted of 15 ministers, 7 of whom were part of UPLD, 5 of Tahoeraa, and 3 of *Ia Ora Te Fenua*. Flosse himself did not want any position in the new government (*TP*, 16 Feb 2009).

With 37 of 57 seats in the assembly, the new government held the strongest majority since 2004. For a short while, hope was rising that the chronic instability was finally being overcome.

Meanwhile, the courts continued their inquiries into past wrongdoings of leading politicians, who had previously been virtually immune from justice for decades. On 3 December, for his illegal use of public land for a private party house, Mahina Mayor Emile Vernaudon was sentenced to a suspended one-year jail sentence,

a fine of 3 million CFP francs (about US\$30,000), and one year of ineligibility for public office (*TPM*, Jan 2009). Subsequently, on 22 January, Vernaudeau was removed from the mayoralty of Mahina, a post he had held since 1978 (*TPM*, Feb 2009). On 5 January, Leonard Puputauki, the former commander of the presidential security and aid agency GIP under Flosse's presidency before 2004, was sentenced to a three-year prison term and a fine of 5 million CFP francs (about US\$50,000) for his responsibility in the death of several sailors on the GIP ship *Tahiti Nui*, which had been wrecked on a reef in September 2003 (*TPM*, Feb 2009).

Another affair possibly involving the GIP, the unresolved death of French journalist Jean-Pascal Couraud in 1997, made its way into the headlines once more in January 2009. Couraud, who had been working on a story about a corruption affair potentially involving Flosse and then French President Jacques Chirac, disappeared in December 1997, and his body has never been found. Initially treated as a suicide, the case was reopened in 2004 when Vetea Guilloux, a former GIP member, gave controversial testimony in which he claimed that his colleagues, under orders from their superiors, had kidnapped, tortured, and killed Couraud on a ship and dumped his body into the sea. During a search of Flosse's house in Pirae in September 2008, police found a written statement by Vetea Cadousteau, another former GIP agent who had died under unclear circumstances in 2004, which confirms Guilloux's testimony. The presentation of this document to the public on 29 December (*NT*, 30 Dec 2008) caused Flosse to give a press

conference on 21 January. Since the authenticity of the document has so far not been established, Flosse and his attorneys claimed it to be a forgery produced by his political opponents in order to damage his career. His theory failed to explain, however, how the document ended up in the drawer of his desk, where the police found it (*TPM*, Jan–Feb 2009). While the investigations concerning the Couraud case continued, local journalist Alex Du Prel was sentenced by a Paris court to a fine of €1,000 (about US\$1,400) for slander, because he had in an earlier article accused the local judiciary of inaction in the case (*TPM*, July 2009).

The Couraud case was not the only one possibly implicating Senator Flosse. In another affair involving corruption, the former director of the Postal and Telecommunications Office, Alphonse Teriierooiterai, and French businessman Michel Yonker were arrested and placed in detention on 24 April (*TPM*, May 2009). A few months later, on 12 June, French millionaire businessman Hubert Haddad, a close friend of Gaston Flosse, was arrested during a visit to Tahiti and jailed as well (*TPM*, July 2009).

It was coalition politics, however, that filled the headlines again, as the allegedly stable governing coalition of UPLD, Tahoeraa, and Rautahi broke apart after barely two months of existence. The new political crisis began in mid-March, when President Temaru returned from a working trip to Paris. While Temaru and his ministers presented their negotiations with French government officials as successful, Flosse claimed the trip was redundant and that it had brought no substantial results (*TP*, 8 and 16 March 2009). In the following weeks, Flosse made

similar comments, criticizing the government's lack of action facing the ongoing economic crisis (*TP*, 27 March 2009). While divisions within the governing coalition thus became increasingly obvious, opposition assembly members under their leader Tong Sang behaved suspiciously uncritical toward Temaru. On 31 March, Tong Sang publicly declared to be ready to work together with the president.

Temaru at first attempted to ignore Tong Sang's declaration and downplayed Flosse's critical comments, but in early April, he began to make serious efforts to hold his coalition together. Since the annual reelection of the assembly Speaker was coming up, Temaru gave Flosse an ultimatum to stop his comments and submit himself to the majority, or resign from his mandate as an assembly member; otherwise, UPLD would not reelect Fritch as assembly Speaker (*TPM*, May 2009). At the same time, the president started negotiating with Tong Sang about the possible formation of a unitary government including To Tatou Aia.

Flosse reacted to these moves with outrage and called a special board meeting of his Tahoeraa party on 7 April, at which they decided to leave Temaru's government and join the opposition. At the same time, Flosse heavily criticized Tong Sang, whom he accused of undermining the Flosse-Temaru coalition by order of the French government (*TP*, 7 April 2009).

Temaru nevertheless went ahead in his negotiations with Tong Sang, and they agreed on the formation of a new majority. On 9 April, Philip Schyle of To Tatou Aia was elected the new Speaker with an overwhelming majority of forty votes, against only fourteen for Fritch. However, this change of

coalition partners was not uncontested within Temaru's own ranks. Several leading members of UPLD voiced their concern and declared their opposition to Tong Sang, whom they, like Flosse, accused of being a French puppet. Two UPLD members thus voted for Fritch, and two more abstained (*TP*, 9 April 2009).

During the following days, Temaru tried hard to form a unitary government that included all parties. Unsurprisingly, however, Flosse refused to participate and insisted on remaining in the opposition. On 17 April, Temaru presented his new cabinet; besides the incumbent 7 UPLD ministers and 2 of the 3 incumbents of Bouissou's Ia Ora Te Fenua, it included 5 new ministers of To Tatou Aia, most of them ministers in Tong Sang's previous cabinets (*TPM*, May 2009).

Two Tahoeraa incumbents, Teva Rohfritsch and Frédéric Riveta, refused to follow the directions of their party and retained their ministries. This act of defiance led to the suspension of their party membership by order of a special Tahoeraa board meeting on 20 April. This time, however, the authoritarian handling of their case backfired on Flosse, as one of his closest followers, Bruno Sandras, the mayor of Papara and one of the country's two deputies in the French National Assembly, resigned his party membership in protest and solidarity with Rohfritsch and Riveta (*TP*, 20 April 2009). On 24 April, even Flosse's hitherto most loyal lieutenant, Edouard Fritch, asked his father-in-law Flosse to retire from politics in order to let the party modernize itself and become less authoritarian (*TP*, 24 April 2009).

This most recent episode in the

political drama of French Polynesia was quite significant, as it showed how irrelevant political ideologies have become, since by now, all political parties have at one time been in a coalition with one another, even if their purported ideologies are as different as French Gaullist-affiliated (To Tatou Aia) and pro-independence Tahitian nationalist (UPLD) (*TPM*, May 2009). Since opportunism might soon become the only measurement of politicians' maneuvering, it seems unlikely that a recipe to create political stability will emerge anytime soon.

Another unresolved issue that entered the headlines concerned the consequences of French nuclear testing, which had taken place between 1966 and 1996, on the health of the country's inhabitants. On 23 March, French Minister of Defense Hervé Morin announced the introduction of a bill to grant compensation to all former test-site workers suffering from a number of specific radiation-caused diseases. This would represent a great step forward, as until a few years ago the French government denied that any health damage had been caused by its tests. In the few lawsuits that had been won by test victims in the last few years, the burden of proof of suffering from a radiation-caused disease was on the plaintiff. The draft bill stated that all former test-site workers would have a claim to receive compensation if they suffered from one of the diseases defined in the bill. For the verification of each case, a commission of physicians and lawyers would be created within the Ministry of Defense.

The nuclear test victims associations AVEN (in France) and Moruroa

e Tatou (MeT, in French Polynesia) had mixed reactions to the bill. While AVEN generally approved of the initiative, the organization questioned whether the bill would really help all the victims, since according to its estimates, only a few hundred among the thousands of nuclear-test veterans would qualify for compensation. MeT was even more critical. Its chairman, Roland Oldham, lauded the French government's finally acknowledging health damage due to radiation, but he expressed his doubts about its having a serious commitment to helping the victims. Nuclear-testing expert Bruno Barillot, a collaborator of MeT, mentioned that the amount of money provided for compensation in the bill, divided by the number of potential victims, was far less than the amounts of compensation received by test victims who had recently won individual lawsuits. Barillot furthermore expressed doubt that the compensation commission could act independently if it was operating under the Ministry of Defense, which, he said, would be "as if one asks a torturer to compensate his victims" (*TPM*, April 2009). In a communiqué of 5 April, MeT denounced the bill as "disgraceful" and "fraudulent" because of its lack of transparency, and asked the government of French Polynesia to employ all means to achieve a substantial revision before the bill's introduction into the French Parliament (*TP*, 5 April 2009). After meeting with the leaders of MeT, President Temaru's cabinet council unanimously rejected the bill (*TP*, 29 April 2009).

At the same time, on 27 April, the litigation of a historic case began in the Papeete court, in which eight mem-

bers of MeT had sued the territorial health insurance CEP as well as their former employer, the French Nuclear Energy Commission, because the two institutions refused to recognize their radiation-related health problems as occupational diseases. While the plaintiffs' attorneys were optimistic about their chances to win, President Temaru was rather skeptical, stating that only an international court would have the necessary neutrality to make a fair decision (*TPM*, May 2009). The litigation took several months until the decision was made on 25 June. Only one of the plaintiffs won, with the French Nuclear Energy Commission sentenced to pay him compensation, whereas the lawsuits of the seven other plaintiffs were dismissed (*TPM*, July 09).

The Morin bill was further discussed, and the Assembly of French Polynesia, when asked for advice, gave a "reserved" (ie, neither for nor against) opinion on 14 May (*TPM*, June 2009). A Tahitian delegation met with Minister Morin in mid-June to urge improvements (*TPM*, July 2009), but on 25 June, the Morin bill was adopted by the French National Assembly without major modifications (*TP*, 25 June 2009).

Meanwhile, an issue of cultural preservation and spiritual heritage attracted attention. On 21 March, 1,500 activists gathered at Tataa Point (the northwestern cape of Tahiti Island at the boundary between Faaa and Punaauia municipalities) in order to hold a traditional religious ceremony and thereby confirm the sacredness of the place. In traditional Tahitian religion, Tataa Point is the gathering point for the souls of the dead

before their departure to the other world, making it one of the most important sacred places of the entire island. Similar beliefs are held all over Polynesia. For example, Fatuosofia Point on Upolu (Sāmoa), Ka'ena Point on O'ahu (Hawai'i), or Cape Reinga on the North Island (Aotearoa/New Zealand) have a comparable function. Whereas these places are protected as natural parks or historic sites, the land of Tataa Point was recently bought by a hotel company, which has been operating a luxury hotel in immediate proximity to the sacred place for many years and is now planning to extend the hotel complex onto the Tataa property. In the course of a general renaissance of traditional Polynesian religion, an association was formed the previous year in order to protect the sacred site. The participants of the ceremony reiterated their demands and asked the government to declare Tataa Point a protected site immediately in order to prevent its desecration and stop the construction plans (*TP*, 21 March 2009).

While this and many similar initiatives to protect and perpetuate the country's cultural heritage are continuing, the related issue of customary leadership came up again in late May. Joinville Pomare, heir of the royal family that ruled Tahiti until the French annexation in 1880, was proclaimed king of Tahiti under the style of Pomare XI in a ceremony attended by about a hundred of his followers in Pirae. In addition, high chiefs were appointed for Tahiti's districts as well as some of the outer islands. The coronation was part of a campaign for the recognition of traditional chiefly titles that Pomare has been leading for sev-

eral years. In a communiqué, Pomare stated that France broke its promise to respect the king, the district chiefs, and the traditional land tenure system in the treaty of annexation signed with his great-great-granduncle Pomare V in 1880, and that the restoration of these institutions was the first step to ensure the respect of the treaty (*TP*, 28 May 2009; *TPM*, May 2009).

While Pomare's coronation and related initiatives represent an interesting alternative to party politics, the latter were once again filling the headlines as the European elections approached. French Polynesia is represented in the European Parliament as part of the three-seat French Overseas constituency, but voting turnouts are usually very low. Nevertheless, the preparation of the elections had some impact on the political life of the country. In late May, five candidates from French Polynesia presented themselves on various French party lists, including former Temaru government minister and independence supporter Keitapu Maamaatuaiahutapu on the Socialist party list supported by UPLD; equipment minister Tearii Alpha of To Tatou Aia on the list of UMP, who was also supported by Jean-Christophe Bouissou's Rautahi party and ex-Tahoeraa deputy Bruno Sandras (*TP*, 22 and 25 May 2009); as well as Nicole Bouteau on the list of French centrist party Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem). Most striking was the absence of a Tahoeraa candidate. The party had overcome its latest internal divisions when Edouard Fritch had retracted his criticism and once more supported Flosse as the unquestioned party leader (*TP*, 5 May 2009). To everyone's surprise, Tahoeraa then invited Alpha to a party convention

and announced that it would support the UMP ticket (*TP*, 2 June 2009). Following this most recent return of Tahoeraa to its former pro-French Gaullist stance, rumors spread about the formation of a new "autonomist alliance" of all anti-independence parties ("autonomist" meaning pro-French, in local political discourse) in order to topple Temaru. Flosse clarified that the alliance was for the European elections only, making the rumors seem to be unfounded, at least for the time being.

The elections on 6 June had the usual low turnout (a little more than 20 percent). Despite the supposed rallying of all "autonomist" parties behind the UMP ticket, the latter scored second with only 32.7 percent, slightly behind the UPLD-supported Socialist ticket, which won the majority with 33.25 percent of the votes. The MoDem list scored third with 17.83 percent. Since neither Maamaatuaiahutapu nor Alpha were on leading positions on their respective lists, neither of them won a seat in the European Parliament (results from French Ministry of the Interior Web site).

The European elections were not the only occasion for political ideologies to create divisions within the Temaru–Tong Sang coalition. Shortly thereafter, tensions arose again, this time around the issue of independence. At the opening of the "Etats Généraux de l'Outre-Mer," a workshop on the future of French overseas territories initiated by the French government, Temaru used the term *Maohi Nui* (Greater Maohi) instead of *French Polynesia* and stated that independence should be where the country is heading (*TP*, 11 and 16

June 2009). The following day, Tong Sang insisted that the French presence was beneficial for the country and should be maintained (*TP*, 17 June 2009). A few days later, Tong Sang signed an agreement in Paris, making his To Tatou Aia party the official French Polynesia chapter of the UMP (*TP*, 18 June 2009). During an assembly session the following week, Flosse severely criticized Temaru's pro-independence position, which he had previously tolerated if not encouraged (*TP*, 26 June 2009).

At the annual "autonomy holiday" of 29 June, commemorating both the signing of the 1880 annexation document and the enactment of a 1984 statute of internal autonomy for the territory, one could see Flosse once more together with Tong Sang and Bouissou celebrating autonomy within the French Republic. As usual, President Temaru boycotted the festivities while honoring Tahitian resistance to colonization at a monument in Faaa (*TPM*, July 2009). The previous year, Flosse had participated in Temaru's ceremony for the first time, but this year, he was absent again. The political leaders thus symbolically reaffirmed their respective ideologies, while those ideologies have become virtually meaningless in their actions.

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TPM, *Tahiti Pacifique Magazine*. Monthly. Tahiti. <http://www.tahiti-pacifique.com>

MĀORI ISSUES

For the first time since I began writing these reviews on Māori issues in 1994, I can provide a report that in total has more positive aspects than negative. The highlight has been the influence the Māori Party has been able to have on the new National-led government. There were also the benefits that are finally starting to flow to Māori after the Labour government, in its dying days, set out to win back Māori support through Treaty of Waitangi claims settlements. New Zealand still has a very long way to go before Māori are accorded the respect owed us as the country's first nation. That includes recognizing and upholding our sovereignty as guaranteed by the Treaty of Waitangi and reversing the shocking statistical trends in all socio-economic areas. Nevertheless, this past year looked like a good start in that direction.

The November 2008 election resulted in a landslide victory for the conservative National Party, which won 58 seats in the 120-seat Parliament. With support of the right-wing ACT Party's 5 seats, the National Party had sufficient numbers to form a government. However, the new prime minister, John Key, announced that he would lead a National minority government with confidence-and-