

FRENCH POLYNESIA

In the year 1996–97, territorial President Gaston Flosse exerted renewed efforts to promote a favorable impression of the French presence in the region. His mission was helped by the fact that any fears the French testing center might reopen for business are dissipating as the site's facilities are being completely dismantled. Regrettably, territorial political life is still rife with corruption, most notably with the dismissal of eleven territorial councillors for electoral fraud. The national assembly elections in Tahiti held few surprises, with candidates from the conservative ruling coalition winning both seats. The government's continuing popularity is in part assured by its launching of a splendid range of major public works projects subsidized by the postnuclear funds from France. This review concludes with a brief tribute to the life of Francis Sanford.

In the wake of the final series of French nuclear tests in the Pacific, Gaston Flosse continued his diplomatic campaign to redeem France's image among island governments and raise the territory's (and his own) profile in regional affairs. To this end, at the fifth Pacific leaders' conference held by the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP) in Suva in July, Flosse promised US\$200,000 on behalf of French Polynesia and France to ensure the financial viability and continuation of the conference. The PIDP meeting represents one of the few opportunities for Flosse to participate as an equal among island leaders, given that Tahiti is ineligible to be a member of the South Pacific Forum.

Flosse has thus become a passionate advocate of the meeting.

In another move designed to endear the territory to regional leaders, Flosse bestowed honors on three heads of government in mid-1996. The French Organic Law of April 1996, granting expanded autonomy to the territory, conferred the right for Tahiti to freely determine its own distinctive symbols. The new statutory law allowed the creation of a territorial system of honors, entitled Order of Tahiti Nui, which was passed into legislation by the Territorial Assembly in June 1996. The first recipients of the new honors were Fiji's Sitiveni Rabuka, Vanuatu's Maxime Carlot Korman, and the Cook Islands' Sir Geoffrey Henry.

After the end of the nuclear test series, Flosse took it upon himself to announce that a conference would be held in Paris in September for Pacific leaders to discuss the postnuclear role of France in the Pacific. The hasty choice of date proved ill advised, as it was scheduled only ten days after the meeting of the South Pacific Forum, which had still to decide whether to readmit France into the Post-Forum Dialogue after its suspension the previous year because of the final test series. As a result of this poor timing, in July Flosse announced that the Pacific leaders' meeting in Paris would be deferred until an undetermined date in 1997.

At the Forum meeting itself, held in Majuro on 2 September, a Tahitian delegation caused a minor diplomatic incident when a territorial minister and an adviser to President Flosse arrived uninvited to press the case for France's readmission to the Post-Forum

Dialogue. Although the Tahitians were politely excluded from the Forum's deliberations, ultimately on 3 September the leaders did decide to readmit France, effective immediately. As a result, at the Dialogue meeting held a few days later France was represented by the French minister for European Affairs, Michel Barnier, and Gaston Flosse.

While progress is being made in Tahiti's relations with its Pacific neighbors, the same cannot be said for its attitude to the European Union (EU) with which it is associated as an overseas territory. In early February, Flosse launched into a passionate diatribe against the European Union. "Be European, yes. But not at any price!" He invoked the dangers of an invasion of European immigrants to the territory in view of new directives that, if applied, would allow EU citizens easy access to set up residence and seek employment in the territory. He also accused Europe of giving the overseas territories only 10 percent of the financial aid granted per capita to overseas departments.

On 20 February, Flosse moved and passed a resolution in the Territorial Assembly that "the obligations imposed [by Europe] on FP largely outweigh the advantages that she gets . . . she demands immediately that the power granted by her statute be recognised and protected from all incursions by European law. [The Territorial Assembly was] convinced that the free installation of Europeans would pose a grave risk of social disequilibrium. . . ." Flosse further warned that "if at the outset of negotiations we do not get satisfaction, I think we will be driven

to sever all links with the EU" (*Tahiti Pacifique*, March 1997, pp 8, 53).

An earlier vote by the French Senate in July had provoked concern along similar lines. The Senate voted in favor of a bill that abolished the requirement of a return airfare for metropolitan French traveling to overseas French possessions. This move revived fears in Tahiti that there would be an uncontrolled influx of people seeking work and residence in a territory that is already struggling to combat high unemployment.

The dismantling of facilities at the Moruroa test site has been progressing slowly. Virtually everything will be destroyed, except for five blockhouses used to monitor the atmospheric tests, the airport runway, and port facilities. French Atomic Energy Commission authorities predict it will take two years to complete the process. This time frame will allow for the gradual voluntary separation of some four hundred employees of the test center. President Flosse confirmed that France would maintain a permanent laboratory for radiological surveillance and several technicians to run it. Flosse also reported that Moruroa is unsuitable for any commercial enterprises, such as tourism, because of the high costs of transporting goods and services to the isolated atoll.

The remaining medium- and low-level nuclear waste at the test sites has been interred in deep shafts and covered with concrete. According to a French military spokesman, General Michel Boileau, the atoll will be returned to its "original state" following a program of revegetation. Boileau insists that no radioactivity remains on

the surface of either Moruroa or Fangataufa. The extent of any surface radioactivity and the likelihood of future leakage from radioactive substances underground should be clarified in a forthcoming report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, due to be released early in 1998.

As part of France's new policy of transparency, in October a press delegation, and later a delegation from the French parliament, were invited to inspect the dismantling of facilities and cleaning up at the atolls. The parliamentary delegation represented the three major parties and included a specialist on nuclear wastes, Mr Bataille. He sought guarantees that France would fulfill its responsibilities and ensure that monitoring of the test sites continued not just for ten years, but for several generations. The delegation also noted that the French parliament has a right to call for independent verification of radioactive monitoring at Moruroa in addition to that undertaken by the French Atomic Energy Commission and the military, though whether it will exercise this right is unclear. (For more on nuclear issues, see the Region in Review, 1996 [*Contemporary Pacific* 9:448-457; 1997].)

Territorial political life was as colorful as ever in respect to corruption allegations and continuing court cases. During the year, a number of mayors were convicted for corruption and forced to pay fines and give up their public offices. In November, a corruption case implicating Flosse and the former Pape'ete mayor-cum-national deputy, Jean Juventin, was sent to the Correctional Tribunal in Paris by the

Court of Appeal. Flosse will be judged for passive corruption and complicity relating to clandestine casinos in his municipality of Pirae in 1991 and 1992. Juventin must face similar charges concerning casinos in Pape'ete in 1988. The casinos were managed by Julien Li Lem, alias Hombo, who is facing charges of active corruption and running illegal casinos. Hombo has publicly declared that Flosse and Juventin accepted bribes for their personal gain and for their respective political parties in return for turning a blind eye to the casinos' operations. As in the past, concluding these court cases has proved painfully slow.

In a shock move on 25 March, the state-run Administrative Tribunal annulled the election of eleven territorial councillors from the last election held in May 1996. Their alleged electoral fraud involved the misuse of funds designated to assist the outer islands to facilitate the election of members of the government majority, that is, the Tahoeraa party of Flosse. The commission deciding distribution of these funds, presided over by a Tahoeraa member, had provided housing benefits to inhabitants of the Leeward Islands just prior to the 1996 territorial elections to influence voting preferences. Flosse was named in connection with dubious practices in the Marquesas, where he gave his approval for the construction of a football field and provided materials and labor for the project from the territorial public works service. These incidents led to the dismissal of eleven Tahoeraa councillors, three from the Marquesas and eight from the Leeward Islands.

The tribunal's move to rein in electoral fraud comes after many years of allegations that public funds, services, and jobs have been routinely used to influence voters, particularly in favor of parties incumbent in government. The standing down of more than a third of the governing majority is unprecedented. Moreover, by-elections for eleven members of the forty-one-seat assembly could tip the balance of power if voters turn against Tahoeraa due to its implication in fraud. In view of the dire consequences the government faces as a result of by-elections, on 1 April Flosse launched an appeal to the Council of State in France to overturn the Administrative Tribunal's decision. At the time of writing the outcome of this appeal was not known. New elections are scheduled for these electoral districts in late 1997, though the pro-independence leader, Oscar Temaru, has called for new elections to be held throughout the territory.

In a separate development, for the first time the courts judged that the French Overseas Radio and Television network, RFO, had exhibited bias in its allocation of air time to different political parties prior to the territorial election. The court condemned the fact that in the first four months of 1996, RFO had provided five times as much coverage to the governing Tahoeraa party as it had to opposition parties, including the pro-independence party of Oscar Temaru. Subsequently, in April, RFO came under fire again for its partial treatment of politics. Flosse had accused Temaru on RFO TV of having been responsible for the riots that led to the destruction of the airport in

September 1995. When Temaru sought the right of reply on RFO, his request was refused.

In another blow to the Tahoeraa majority, its parent party and metropolitan ally, the *Rassemblement Pour la Republique*, was toppled from power in May. The governing conservative coalition in France made a tactical error in deciding to hold early elections for a new National Assembly. A backlash over unemployment, immigration policy, and relations with the European Union saw the conservatives ousted, and a coalition dominated by the socialists came to power. It remains to be seen whether the territorial government will have stormy relations with the socialists as it has done in the past, although President Chirac can be expected to continue protecting the interests of his protégé and friend, Gaston Flosse.

The national election results were somewhat different for the two candidates chosen to represent French Polynesia. As the poll was held a week earlier there than in metropolitan France, voters were unaffected by the tide of discontent that turned against Jacques Chirac's *Rassemblement Pour la Republique*. Instead, conservative candidates from the territory's governing coalition won majorities in the first round without having to contest a second run-off. In the eastern electorate, Emile Vernaudeau, the mayor of Mahina and leader of the *Ai'a Api* party, which is allied to Tahoeraa, won comfortably with 58.9 percent of the votes cast. In the western district, Michel Buillard, a Tahoeraa minister and mayor of Pape'ete, won with a narrower margin of 51.5 percent.

Nevertheless, Buillard was given a run for his money by Oscar Tamaru, the pro-independence leader and mayor of Faaa, who gained a strong vote of 41.6 percent.

Overall, the pro-independence party Tavini made solid gains throughout most of the archipelagoes, especially in the Windward Islands, but Tahoeraa kept its grip on the Marquesas. As always though, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from trends in national elections held in Tahiti. Knowing that the outcome will not have a direct impact on local politics, voters can use these elections as a protest vote against the incumbent government without necessarily supporting independence or transferring their votes to opposition parties when it comes to territorial and municipal elections. The real extent of support for Tavini and other opposition parties will be demonstrated in the forthcoming territorial by-elections.

The problem of disposing of Tahiti's waste remained unresolved and was a source of contention throughout the year. In mid-1996, for the third time in as many years, the date for the closure of the over-full Faaa municipal dump came and went in the absence of alternative rubbish sites being developed. STOM, the public company charged with resolving the waste issue, proved incapable of fulfilling its mission. In February, the government established a new semipublic company to deal with the urban waste problem, the Polynesian Environment Society, in which the territory would retain a majority share.

A site in the valley of Papenoo was identified to host the new waste disposal facility. The choice of location

has provoked considerable opposition from local residents, mayors, and environmentalists. Apart from a not-in-my-backyard attitude, reasons for this opposition include that Papenoo is subject to the highest rainfall level in Tahiti, the site is close to a river system, and the long road servicing the site would need to undergo constant repairs to accommodate the heavy traffic of garbage trucks.

In the year under review, the territorial government decided on several major public works projects and other socioeconomic initiatives, to be largely financed by the special postnuclear era funds granted by President Chirac. These projects are meant to improve infrastructure and social services, create jobs, and generally boost the ailing economy. On the health front, there will be a new hospital to replace the one in Mamao, a new psychiatric hospital to replace the old institution in Vaiami, and a cardiology clinic. With regard to public housing, the government made a commitment to building seven thousand new lodgings over the coming decade. A new building to house the Territorial Assembly's administration will be constructed at a cost of 1.2 billion FCFP, and the presidential office will move to a historic building, Caserne Broche, to be refurbished at a cost of 600 million FCFP.

In September, President Flosse revealed an ambitious plan to build a tunnel under the lagoon to connect the Faaa airport with Pape'ete's seaport. This was proposed to alleviate the chronic traffic congestion in the capital. The tunnel is estimated to cost 12 billion FCFP. The idea is for the tunnel to be constructed privately and eventu-

ally recoup its costs via a toll of 100 FCFP each time a vehicle uses it. It is hoped that by a year after its opening, 25,000 cars will travel via the tunnel each day. However, considerable doubts have been aired in the public domain about whether it is feasible for an island that accounts for only 40,000 vehicles to recoup the costs of the tunnel.

On 31 October, Flosse launched another grand project, this time to establish the territory's own international airline. The decision to proceed was based on three years of feasibility studies. Initially called Tahiti Airline, it later underwent a name change to Air Tahiti-Nui with a view to removing the anglophone connotations. The first plane to be acquired will be an Airbus 340-300 with a passenger-carrying capacity of 380. The first airbus will be delivered in April 1998. It will mainly service routes connecting Tahiti with the United States, Japan, and Korea.

The Territorial Assembly has voted to contribute 10 percent of the initial capital for the airline to encourage private investors to take the plunge. It is expected that the airline will post a loss of 250 million FCFP in its first year of operation, but that it will produce profits of 300 million and 1 billion FCFP in the subsequent two years. If all goes according to plan, another plane will be acquired. The government is confident that Air Tahiti-Nui will promote tourism and generally fare better than many of the unprofitable airlines run by neighboring Pacific microstates.

Yet another project, supported by the territory even though it is not

directly involved in the execution, is the forthcoming debut of a new luxury cruise ship. The Paul Gauguin luxury liner of 16,000 tonnes will carry 320 passengers and is destined to cruise mainly around the Society Islands. It is presently under construction, with plans for a launching in January 1998. Though Tahiti will benefit from the visiting tourists, the liner will be registered in Wallis and Futuna and managed by an American company. An additional project to stimulate tourism is the planned construction of a new hotel of 252 rooms in Arue. This hotel will be targeted at an older clientele, principally retired metropolitan French civil servants.

In September, the government implemented legislation to create a youth employment initiative. The new measure is directed toward low-skilled, unemployed young people of 17 to 26 years of age, with a view to subsidizing their employment in the private sector for up to eight months and providing them with supplementary training. This policy was in part prompted by the large involvement of unemployed youth in the September 1995 riots. Concern over unemployment was shown to be warranted once official figures were released by the Territorial Institute of Statistics (ITSTAT) in October.

The latest statistics on employment were collected in 1994. At that time there were ostensibly 9,320 unemployed out of an active population of 79,120 people, which translates into an official unemployment rate of 11.8 percent. However, the real rate has been estimated to be in the vicinity of 16,000 unemployed. The public and

private sectors account for 17,876 and 26,864 jobs respectively, with an additional 5,000 in the liberal professions, leaving the remaining 30,000 workers (or 44 percent) in the traditional sector of subsistence agriculture and fisheries. Ninety per cent of people of working age are resident in the Society Islands, which confirms the inexorable exodus of people from the outlying islands to the urban areas.

In December, provisional results from ITSTAT's census of the territory's population in September were released. A total of 219,521 inhabitants were divided among the archipelagoes as follows: Windward Islands (including Tahiti) 162,686; Leeward Islands 26,838; Marquesas 8,064; Tuamotu-Gambiers 15,370; Australs 6,811. The island of Tahiti, where the capital, Pape'ete, is situated, accounts for 68.6 percent of the territory's population. In French Polynesia, 94,651 of the inhabitants (or 43 percent) are less than twenty years of age. Population growth since the last census eight years earlier has been at a rate of 16.3 percent, or 1.9 percent per year. This represents a decrease compared to the previous census period of 1983-1988, which registered a growth of 2.6 percent per year.

Fiscal reform to reduce the territorial government's dependence on import duties, which account for 70 percent of collected revenue, has been a long-standing source of contention in territorial politics and also in the territory's relations with the French state. The territory has to date had no form of income tax. After years of to-ing and fro-ing over constitutional issues, the French National Assembly finally

approved territorial legislation for a modest Contribution to Territorial Solidarity tax in March that is meant to cover increased public health costs.

In February the Territorial Assembly also adopted legislation to implement a value added tax to take effect in January 1998. A report by ITSTAT (Jan 1997), assessing the pros and cons of such a goods and services tax, noted several potentially negative outcomes. First, the tax would not be egalitarian because it was likely to have a greater impact on poorer households. Second, it is likely to provoke inflation, which would in turn deter investment and tourism. Inflationary pressures could also be brought to bear on salaries, especially those of the public service, which are indexed to the cost of living. The end result could thus be a redistribution of wealth in the territory from the private sector to the public sector.

Several categories of goods and services will be exempt from the value added tax, including medical services, education, cultural activities, financial services, water, and goods sold by farmers and fishermen. Key categories to be subject to the tax include the sale of new products, port and airport services, telecommunications and computers, energy distribution, and transport. The standard rate of tax will be 3 percent, while some goods and services, including food, nonalcoholic beverages, publications, hotel services, and interisland transport, will be subject to a lower tax of 1-2 percent. The government's plan is not to add to the total tax burden, but to substitute the value added tax for existing duties on imports, which will be phased out over five years. However, given that the

value added tax will still weigh heavily on new products imported from abroad, it is unlikely to make a huge difference to the current reliance on import duties.

With sadness I report the passing of Francis Ariioehau Sanford, who died at his home in Faaa on 21 December at 84 years of age. I had the good fortune to interview this key player in Tahitian politics during my last visit to the territory. His career spanned a diverse range of roles in the public service and politics. He worked first as an administrator in the Tuamotus, and later in Bora Bora throughout the Second World War. After a period of teaching, he became secretary to the French governor in 1963. His foray into politics began with his election as the first mayor of Faaa in 1965, a position he held until 1983. He was elected to the National Assembly in 1967 and held this office until 1978. Sanford was the driving force behind the Ai'a Api party, which he cofounded in 1965. He led the territorial government in coalition with the Here Ai'a party from 1967 to 1972, and again from 1977 to 1982. He fell from power after his party was decimated in the 1983 elections.

From 1967 onward, Sanford became known for his relentless opposition to the French nuclear testing program, a campaign he took to the French National Assembly and even to the United Nations. His strategy of collaborating with the French and global antitesting movement certainly hastened France's decision to cease atmospheric testing in 1975. He also fought long and hard for an expansion of the territory's autonomy in relation to France. Sanford's linkage of the two

goals of ending the tests and expanding autonomy meant that for many years the French state would not budge on either. At one point he became so frustrated in his quest that he threatened to push for independence, but eventually settled for a limited statute of autonomy in 1977. Sanford retired from politics in 1985, yet, as a respected elder statesman, he remained in great demand as an adviser to the new generation of politicians.

KARIN VON STROKIRCH

HAWAIIAN ISSUES

A heated debate erupted in Honolulu in the summer of 1996 regarding the State of Hawai'i-sponsored plebiscite on the question of Hawaiian sovereignty. The plebiscite was the state's response to the "taro roots" march of seventeen thousand Hawaiians on 'Iolani Palace (former governmental seat of the Hawaiian Kingdom) in January 1993 demanding sovereignty, or political control over Hawaiian Trust Lands, and denouncing the hundred-year-old illegal American presence in Hawai'i.

In November of the same year, the United States Congress serendipitously passed what has become known as the Apology Bill (US Public Law 103-150) that gave additional support to the return of lands to Hawaiians. The 1993 Apology Bill, signed by President Clinton, admitted that in 1893 America illegally invaded Hawai'i and illegally overthrew the democratically elected Hawaiian government. The Apology Bill further stated that "the indigenous Hawaiian