THE EMERGENCE OF PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS IN TONGA

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During the late 1980s the people of Tonga became more aware of the process of politics and more open to suggestions of constitutional change. One of the stimulants of this process has been the emergence of members of parliament who have publicly criticized the government and used the language of democracy and justice to expound their views.

Background

Although there are new and revolutionary features about recent events, it would be wrong to assume that the challenge to authority and demand for change is without precedent; the apparent stability of Tongan politics is not something inherited from the distant past but merely the projection and amplification of an image that is historically shallow. This image of stability, peace, and unity was the achievement of Queen Salote during her forty-seven-year-long reign, 1918 to 1965, and it was only during the second half of her reign that the reality was faithful to the image.

Salote conducted two parallel systems of government: the formal, parliamentary system and an extra-parliamentary one. Parliament was marginalized by her, its management left to her consort while she built her own personal following by dealing directly with the people and dispensing patronage in traditional ways and through the church (Wood Ellem 1981).

Unlike other Pacific nations whose constitutions have been framed in the atmosphere of decolonization since 1960, Tonga's constitution was

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granted by King Tupou I in 1875. Although amended from time to time since, it retains the essential character of a constitutional monarchy. Sometimes loosely described as a "Westminster" system, Tonga's form of government is in fact based on models that predate the modern Westminster style. The 1875 constitution was based on the Hawaiian constitution of 1852, which in turn was based largely on the American constitution. Tongan political practice is accordingly more like that of eighteenth-century England than like either modern Britain or the United States. There are no political parties and no official distinction between "government" and "loyal opposition." Cabinet ministers are appointed directly by the king from outside parliament, and become members of parliament on appointment as ministers. There is thus no requirement, either formal or informal, that the government should have the confidence of parliament, and motions of no-confidence do not occur. Parliament can, however, impeach a minister for maladministration or illegality. This is virtually the only way in which displeasure with the government can be shown, short of defeating all legislation. In practice, no motion of impeachment has ever succeeded, although ministers have evaded impeachment by resignation.

The legislature (called the Legislative Assembly) is a single house made up of three parts: the ministers and governors appointed by the king (now numbering twelve), nine representatives of the hereditary nobles (elected by the nobles),[1] and nine representatives of the people, elected on a universal franchise.[2] Under the original constitution, there were four ministers, twenty nobles (all at that time), and twenty people's representatives. Subsequently, the number of nobles was increased to thirty, and the number of people's representatives was increased to match them. In 1915, nobles and people were reduced to seven representatives each. With modern economic development and a corresponding expansion in the functions of government, the number of ministers has increased to twelve.[3] The enlarged representation of nobles and people (nine each) took effect at the 1984 election.

Since the time of Tupou I, the role of the legislature has usually been regarded as being to endorse the actions of the government (that is, the executive). The ministers, governors, and king together constitute the Privy Council, which meets in the same regular fashion that the cabinet does in parliamentary democracies. For all practical purposes, the Privy Council is the government: its decisions become ordinances with the force of law until they are confirmed or abrogated by the Legislative Assembly. Any measure passing the Legislative Assembly has to be approved by the king before it becomes law. The king therefore has

enormous power to initiate legislation and to veto proposals initiated elsewhere. Indeed, initiatives of the Legislative Assembly itself take the form of suggestions rather than bills, and the Privy Council decides whether they should be taken up to become law. There is no constitutional impediment to the Legislative Assembly initiating law or policy, but it is contrary to long-standing tradition. In 1984, a law was passed specifically enabling private member's bills to be introduced. Constitutional amendments are made in the same way as laws, except that they have to be passed in two consecutive sessions of the Legislative Assembly before being sent for royal approval.

Until 1988, the Privy Council was also the court of appeal; in that year, to avoid the dilemma presented by litigation in which the government was a respondent, a separate court of appeal was established.

A principal distinction between politics in Tonga and politics among its neighbors is that since power is still concentrated so much in the hands of the king, elections have not been issue-based until recently, Electors and their representatives have had little opportunity to influence government decisions--indeed, they have scarcely been able to reject or amend government measures. Members of parliament have not always been quiescent, but they have always been aware of their lack of real power, especially since the reduction of their numbers in 1915.

Tupou IV and Pressures for Change

When Tupou IV became king in 1965, he had the enormous advantage of the inheritance of Queen Sālote's legacy of peace, stability, and prestige; he also had the advantage of nearly twenty-three years of ministerial experience, the last sixteen as prime minister. But Tupou IV brought with him to the throne the seeds of political instability inasmuch as he was a radical modernizer, more comparable with Tupou I than with the conservative Queen Salote. Sālote believed modernization and progress should be subservient to the continued vitality of Tongan tradition. In practice, this meant that she wanted improved standards of living--better health, better nutrition, and better elementary education--within a conservative social, cultural, and political framework. Tupou IV, probably the driving force behind the many developmental initiatives of the last half of Salote's reign, has been dedicated to material progress and rising prosperity as the basis for improved living standards for a rapidly increasing population. His plans have implied an image of Tonga modeled on Western styles of life and consumption patterns. Implicit in this ambition has been a preference for, or at least a toler-

ance of, consequential social changes, which would necessarily bring political changes in their train.

It seems scarcely possible that the king, with his thorough education in modern history among other subjects, would not have understood, from the beginning of his political life, that increased personal prosperity and increased personal educational opportunity would be connected with a more individualistic ethos, as had proven to be the case elsewhere. It is possible that he positively favored such change together with his preference in early life for democratic reform. He is most likely to have been the author of the extension of the franchise to women in 1951.[4] In 1975, he was reported to favor increasing the size of the Legislative Assembly (*Tonga Chronicle,* June 1975), six years before it was actually approved by parliament (*Pacific Islands Monthly,* September 1981). Parliamentary sessions have also lasted longer during the reign of Tupou IV, usually five months as against two or three under his predecessor. A further suggestion of the king's political liberalism is in the contrast between his speeches on the opening and closing of the Legislative Assembly each year and those of his predecessor: they are lengthy, detailed reports on the work of government and on his plans for future development and are published in the government newspaper, the *Tonga Chronicle,* in both English and Tongan. Queen Salote's speeches on the same occasions were merely formulistic exhortations to duty and loyalty.

The king's radicalism has, of course, flowed with the tide of history: improved international communications might be thought to have inevitably brought many of the changes attributed to his policies. On the contrary, Tongan isolation could easily have been maintained by a stubborn and authoritarian regime; modernization has had to be assiduously promoted by the king, who has striven more than any other individual to break down Tonga's isolation and open it to foreign influences.[5]

These foreign influences are undoubtedly connected with the political unrest of the 1980s, but unrest was inevitable in any case. Radical modernization was the best option in a period when Tonga's population was rapidly approaching the limit that its subsistence economy could support. From 55,000 in 1956, the population increased to 76,000 by 1966 and was expected (in 1966) to reach 102,000 by 1976 (Tonga 1965: 10). This rapid growth, a projected doubling in only twenty years, threatened catastrophic pressure on resources and amenities (with probably catastrophic political consequences) unless urgent action was taken: hence the king's desperate attempts to modernize.

Growing Discontent

By the 1970s, signs of popular discontent reached the point that there were, apparently, fears of popular violence, which led to new security measures being taken (*Matangi Tonga* 2, no. 2 [March-April 1987]: 3). A visiting New Zealand journalist in 1975 wrote that such was the popular mood, only a leader was required for a serious protest to occur (*Tonga Chronicle,* 24 December 1975). Protest, in fact, never went beyond the forms permitted by law and the constitution, its leaders being moderate (even conservative) men of education and reputation in the community.

Parliament was the main forum for the expression of opposition. As early as 1968, a motion had been proposed unsuccessfully in parliament that the number of people's representatives be increased. In 1972, there was a further proposal (also unsuccessful) that the number of nobles' and people's representatives be increased to eight each from seven to catch up with the number of ministers, which had been eight since 1970 (*Tonga Chronicle,* August 1972). In an ominous portent, this session of the legislature saw the people's and nobles' representatives combine to defeat the government's budget estimates for 1974-1975 to signify their dissatisfaction with the failure of the government to increase civil-service salaries in accord with a resolution of the 1973 parliament (*Tonga Chronicle,* 20 June 1974).

For the general election of 1975, thirty candidates contested the seven people's seats, suggesting a comparatively high level of interest in politics at the time;[6] a year later, the prime minister was sued for alleged irregularities in the conduct of the election, an action that might have been what it claimed to be or might have been an expression of opposition and discontent in the only way possible without open confrontation.

The government was evidently worried about open confrontation, expecting apparently that the landless and unemployed would seek their own solutions. But despite the land shortage and the sense of social injustice, leadership of protest came from the moderate, new elite. In 1973, the government had planned to upgrade the airport at Fua'amotu, and this involved clearing the approaches of tall coconut trees. The land users were upset at this loss of trees, but their concerns were voiced by the principal of the adjacent school (Tupou College), the Rev, Siupeli Taliai. Taliai followed this up with a frank and widely publicized sermon on the inequity of land distribution and wrote a letter to the government newspaper stating his case and alleging bribery in the

allotment of land. A vigorous debate followed for some weeks (*Tonga Chronicle,* August 1974). In 1975, this correspondence had its sequel in a seminar on land and migration convened by the leaders of the major churches in Tonga. The king opened the seminar, but parliament (dominated by large landholders) declined to send a representative to participate (*Tonga Chronicle,* 24 July and 21 August 1975). The problems of land shortage and unemployment were freely discussed, and appeals were made for reform.

No directly remedial action was taken by the government to avert the causes of dissent other than to redefine the categories of land ownership to show that the nobles did not actually own the large estates attached to their titles. Other than that, the government's response was the indirect one of pressing ahead--indeed, accelerating--hits program of economic development in the hope that diversification of employment opportunities would soak up the landless population. In the meantime, Tonga was lucky that there were countries willing to accept Tongan emigrants: in November 1974, it was estimated that thirty were obtaining American visas each month, and New Zealand was issuing about six hundred work permits a month to Tongans (*Tonga Chronicle,* 21 November 1974).

This strategy of economic development combined with emigration would work, given time, but it would also lead to more demands for political change from an emerging, urbanized working and middle class, which owed nothing to aristocratic sentiment or tradition for its status and prosperity. In effect, development shifted the locus of discontent from the poor and landless to the educated and comparatively prosperous. This transition lies behind the events of the late 1980s, while emigration and the corresponding inflow of remittances rescued Tonga in the 1970s from potentially more radical politics.

Meanwhile, church and other community leaders (the "new elite") continued to speak out. In parliament, the people's representatives demanded and won a 300 percent salary increase for themselves, and the parliament became increasingly "pre-occupied with trivialities" (*Pacific Islands Monthly,* December 1976), which may mean that members were increasingly willing to argue with the government rather than simply endorse its policies, or it may mean that neither parliament nor government seriously confronted the short-term aspects of the growing demographic and economic crisis. However, in a trend not seen since the 1930s, the nobles gradually came to vote increasingly with the people's representatives against the government, with the result that an

attempt to impeach the acting minister of finance in 1976 was only narrowly defeated (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, December 1976).

Religious and Secular Influences on Public Dissent

This tone of criticism was continued in the next parliament (1978-1980), but in the meantime, much of the popular criticism of government had been muted. This may be due partly to the effects of emigration and the receipt of remittances, both of which did much to alleviate public distress, while the former probably removed many potential leaders of dissent from the scene. Foremost among the critics of government had been the president of the Free Wesleyan Church and king's chaplain, the Rev. Dr. ʻAmanaki Havea. In 1976, he became principal of the Pacific Theological College in Fiji, and in his absence he had been replaced as royal chaplain and church president by the Rev. Dr. Huluholo Moʻungaloa, who abstained from criticism. Moʻungaloa presently set about removing the other leading critic and protagonist in the newspaper debate about land distribution, the Rev. Siupeli Taliai. In January 1980, Moʻungaloa succeeded in having Taliai suspended as principal of Tupou College. He was also suspended as a minister and as secretary of the church conference. Taliai subsequently contested the position of church president in opposition to Moʻungaloa (and, it is said, against the wishes of the king) but was unsuccessful. Taliai was subsequently reinstated as a minister and conference secretary but not as college principal, and later the same year he left Tonga to live permanently in Australia (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, May and September 1980).

It was probably because of the assuaging effect of emigration together with the loss of leadership that the general election of 1981 resulted in the election of candidates who were strongly traditionalist. Four out of seven candidates standing for reelection lost their seats and two others fell from their previous top placings. The *Pacific Islands Monthly* commented that the next three years were likely to be quieter in Tongan politics than the previous three had been (June 1981); and so it proved, despite some controversial (or potentially controversial) measures including legislation for the broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings and increasing the size of parliament (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1981). On the other hand, the Tonga Protected Persons Passport legislation, which had been rejected in 1980 (*Tonga Chronicle*, 14 November 1980) and again in 1981 (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, December 1981), was passed in 1982.

Oddly enough, it was this more traditionalist parliament that voted in September 1981 to increase the numbers of people's and nobles' representatives to nine each. By this time the ministry was ten strong. A proposal gazetted in 1983 to further increase the legislature to twelve people's representatives and eleven nobles failed.

During the early 1980s, parliament may have been generally docile, but public dissent again surfaced. Havea returned from Fiji in 1982 and was reelected to the presidency of the Free Wesleyan Church,[7] which increasingly became associated with the tactful but persistent expression of criticism of social and economic inequality and criticism of corruption. Similarly, the Catholic Church became more evangelistic and more active in improving the living conditions of the people. Its leader, Bishop Patelisio Finau, like Havea, acquired a reputation for outspokenness in his criticism of the status quo.

The pressure for change not only elicited comment from the church, it also agitated the church from within, and was expressed in the emergence of new religious movements. Tongan Christians who believed that the established churches had become spiritually sedentary looked for alternative associations: the Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship was established in 1982 and soon afterwards established a school that grew rapidly; the Assembly of God appeared in 1979, a New Apostolic Church in 1980 (*Pacific Islands Monthly,* July 1980), and a branch of the Salvation Army, with its traditional commitment to social action arm in arm with spiritual revival, was established sometime in the mid-1980s. The Mormon Church, active at the community level and associated in people's minds with material prosperity and foreign educational opportunity, also increased in popularity, claiming 30 percent of the population as adherents in 1986. The Wesleyan majority church, actuated both by growing social needs and the energetic proselytism of these rival denominations, adopted a more evangelical approach, including house visits by church workers traveling in pairs in the Mormon fashion (*Tonga Chronicle,* 17 October 1986). In 1981, the Tongan National Council of Churches launched the Rural Development Programme aimed at improving the quality of housing, water, and food available to rural dwellers (*Tonga Chronicle,* 31 July 1981).

A secular counterpart to these religious movements was the foundation of 'Atenisi University by Futa Helu. Helu had established a school in 1966 devoted to the principle of inquiry as the prime instrument of education. A disciple of the rationalist, empirical school of philosophy, Helu proudly announced the "uselessness" of his style of education: he wanted his school to teach critical thinking above all else and encour-

aged his students to question authority in all things, to ask for reasons, and then to question the reasons. In 1975, Helu added a university division to his school, offering two-year programs leading to associate degrees in the arts and in science (*Tonga Chronicle,* 16 January 1975). Nothing could have been further from the educational philosophy of the king, who was understandably less interested in people's being taught to ask unanswerable questions than in their being taught the utilitarian knowledge that would increase and diversify production and improve the material lives of Tonga's growing population.[8]

Helu's initiative met both criticism and active opposition, but he gradually came to be respected as a man of knowledge and achievement. He became recognized for his erudition on Tongan history and tradition as well as Western knowledge, although many remained suspicious of his eccentricities and putative political and moral radicalism, Above all, Helu showed that the status quo did not have to be accepted.

Graduates of foreign universities were also becoming common in Tonga. In the 1960s, there was literally only a handful; in 1972, 87 out of 351 (25 percent) secondary school teachers had degrees; and by 1981, 221 out of 868 (also 25 percent) (Tonga 1972, 1981). A degree had become a basic requirement for many civil-service positions.[9] Graduates of overseas universities and associates of Helu were to play a leading role in the politics of the late 1980s, articulating criticism of the government and arguing for a more democratic process.

At the same time, economic development was creating a wealthy middle class that was independent of the old aristocracy. This group was coming to expect that its interests should be considered by government and that it should be able to express its views directly to government. The Chamber of Commerce was revived during the early 1980s, and many of the candidates offering themselves for election to parliament did so on the basis of their success in business. Economic reforms since 1982, aimed at stimulating a larger and more vigorous private sector, encouraged this class further in its various ambitions.

Thus by the mid-1980s, conditions had become established that increased the likelihood of a demand for political change. Emigration had kept the population at almost the same level for about a decade, so the problem of landlessness with its implicit threat of political radicalism did not develop much further.[10] Continuing high birthrates, however, had ensured a wide base to the population pyramid so that the numbers coming through the schools onto the labor market still exceeded the capacity of the growing, nonsubsistence sector of the economy to absorb. Accordingly, the numbers of unemployed and underem-

ployed continued to increase. The new elite marked by both education and wealth would also not be long satisfied with the restricted opportunities for participation in policy formation, and the precedents had already been reestablished for attempting to challenge or even frustrate government through parliamentary processes. All that was required now was an issue to crystallize the tentative feelings of discontent and produce a leader. These tendencies converged in 1986, focused on the activities of ‘Akilisi Pohiva.

The Pro-Democratic Challenge

Pohiva had been a schoolteacher since 1964. In 1976, he became a student at the University of the South Pacific in Suva. After graduating, he returned to Tonga and became a lecturer at the Tonga Teachers’ Training College. In 1981, he launched a current affairs radio program, which he conducted regularly until 26 December 1984. From time to time the program attracted unfavorable attention from the government, and in January 1985 steps were taken to ban it. The next month, Pohiva was first promoted to a senior administrative post in the Department of Education and then summarily dismissed. He eventually sued the government for wrongful dismissal in a case that attracted much publicity by the time judgment was handed down in May 1988. By then, Pohiva had become a public figure by another means.

During 1986, the government introduced radical tax reform, reducing personal and company income taxes substantially and levying a general sales tax.[11] Members of parliament toured the country to explain the change to the people. For this they became entitled to overtime payments, some of which were large--ranging from T$1,218 to T$10,391 for work spread over a mere twelve days (*Matangi Tonga* 1, no. 2 [November-December 1986]: 13).[12] Attention was thus attracted to the MPs’ substantial earnings and allowances at a time when inflation was about 35 percent yearly and the tax reforms were actually extracting more money from the poorer majority of the population.

By this time, Pohiva and a few associates (like him, with overseas university qualifications and careers in education) had launched a broadsheet called *Kele‘a,* in which they aimed to raise matters in the public interest. The second issue was exclusively occupied with the question of payments to MPs. The revelations caused widespread shock. Not long afterwards, in what were the first political court cases since the Stuart affair in 1938-1940 (Wood Ellem 1989:33-37), a private citizen, ‘Ipeni Siale, had writs issued against all but three members of the Legislative

Assembly alleging breach of duty in the matter of the overtime payments. At the same time, two MPs (both people's representatives) had writs issued alleging improper parliamentary procedures and the denial of their rights to speak on a bill that had been before the House (*Matangi Tonga* 1, no. 2 [November-December 1986]). This was the beginning of a persistent but uncoordinated campaign to place the government under pressure.

The purpose of applying pressure in this way has itself become an issue in Tongan politics and has raised new questions for Tonga about political principles. Those feeling the pressure and their sympathizers speak of the lack of respect; those exerting the pressure speak sometimes of justice and honesty in government and sometimes of the rights of the people to have the government of their choice. From specific issues, the debate has been enlarged to encompass the merits of democracy versus the merits of a hereditary oligarchy. At this point, the issue had not become a contest directly between rich and poor, landed and landless, but between factions among the comparatively privileged.

The next general election was due in 1987. *Kele'a* had been widely circulated and aroused much interest; Pohiva was well known because of the current affairs program, which had ceased abruptly after more than three years of broadcasting. During 1986 also, parliamentary broadcasts had begun. Initially a fifteen-minute item each evening, they were quickly extended as they proved to be popular. In October 1986, a news magazine was launched, *Matangi Tonga,* which discussed recent political events in detail and in a manner sympathetic to the critics of government. Then finally, on 30 December 1986, a mass street march for peace and justice was organized--not as a political protest but more as an evangelical display. Its rhetoric, however, was appropriate to the political debate that had begun, containing criticisms of both church and state (*Matangi Tonga* 2, no. 1 [January-February 1987]: 6-7).

On the eve of the election, *Matangi Tonga* lectured the people in an editorial on the meaning of democracy: all three groups in parliament --the king's representatives (i.e., the cabinet, often referred to in Tonga as the government), the nobles' representatives, and the people's representatives--could claim to be representing the people, but the people's own direct choices were a minority in the house and often (a separate article pointed out) found themselves in opposition to the other members. The journal did not labor the point, but described the interest in this election as unprecedented.

There were fifty-five candidates (a record number) for the nine peo-

ple's seats. Five sitting members lost their seats, and of the nine successful candidates, six were elected for the first time (one MP had not stood for reelection) and six had university degrees (*Matangi Tonga* 2, no. 2 [March-April 1987]: 6). It was later said of this election that it was the first one in which issues took precedence over local and kinship affiliations in determining people's voting and at least one member who lost his seat said that it was because of the scandal over the overtime pay. ments (*Times of Tonga,* 18 January 1990). Pohiva was elected by a narrow margin in third place for Tongatapu, not a sign of massive support, but considering that he had not yet been vindicated by the court and that he was a Ha'apai man, his election shows clearly that issue-oriented politics had arrived.

The lesson was not lost on any of the contestants. Immediately after the results were known, the election of the two Vava'u representatives was challenged: Hopate Sanft's on the grounds of undue influence and bribery, and 'Ipeni Siale's on the grounds that he had become an American citizen and therefore was not eligible. Both challenges were upheld in the Tongan Supreme Court. Sanft had been one of the more persistent critics of the government in the previous parliament and had brought the court case over parliamentary procedure, and Siale was the man who had brought the court case against MPs over the overtime payments.

The new members lost no time in taking the part of crusaders once the new parliament met. Issues they raised included those that would attract public attention and others more arcane, related to technicalities of government. Among the former was the matter of overtime rates for MPs. An attempt was made to reduce them, unsuccessfully; it was argued that ministers received two salaries--a ministerial one as well as the basic parliamentary one--and an unsuccessful attempt was made to deprive them of the latter. Among the more arcane issues was a challenge to the constitutionality of the Public Finance Act of 1983, questions about the sale of Tongan passports to non-Tongan citizens as a money-raising venture, and the continual difficulty of making the government conform to its own estimates of expenditure. The use of special warrants to authorize overexpenditure was particularly attacked. Although the people's representatives were allowed few victories, as nobles and ministers closed ranks against them, they did succeed in restraining expenditure overruns, especially on the Legislative Assembly itself. Whereas in 1986 the estimated expenditure of T$0.7 million had been exceeded by T$1.3 million, in 1987 expenditure was kept to the budgeted estimate of T$0.8 million.[13]

The following year, 1988, the reformist MPs returned to issues of

moral integrity in politics: the passports issue had led to questions about the legality of actions taken by the minister of finance, and Pohiva introduced a motion (deferred in 1987) to impeach him. After it failed, Laki Niu, a young but widely respected lawyer who also had been elected for the first time in 1987, tried unsuccessfully to reintroduce the motion. Debates in the house became impassioned over many things, but particularly over parliamentary procedure, with the Speaker's impartiality and competence called into question. At length, Pohiva declared that the Legislative Assembly was a refuge of lawbreakers; the Speaker, the Hon. Malupo, threatened Pohiva with imprisonment, even calling the sergeant-at-arms to arrest him.

The people's representatives were not united in ideology, nor coordinated in action, but they were now frequently voting as a bloc, while most nobles and ministers voted en bloc against them. The consequent frustration on the part of the people's representatives, feeling that they had no power to influence government, led Pohiva at last to petition the king directly. About 7,000 signatures were obtained, and the petition was presented on 4 November 1988, Constitution Day. The petition focused mainly on the overtime payments of 1986 and on allegedly illegal actions of the minister of finance. It also reported allegations about other members of parliament (including ministers) and drew attention to the demand for increased popular representation. An accompanying sixty-page document presented evidence in support of the allegations. The petition, however, brought no immediate results.

The 1989 Walkout: Issues and Opposing Views

The 1989 parliamentary session was even more contentious than that of 1988. The passports issue arose again, and this time Pohiva took it outside parliament to the Supreme Court. The failure of the government to buy copra from farmers dependent on the crop was a major issue; so was the delay of an overdue salary increase for civil servants while a 25 percent salary increase for parliamentarians became effective immediately. Meanwhile, questions of fairness and integrity were kept before the public view by publicity given to court cases brought by government employees who, like Pohiva, had been improperly dismissed. The overriding issue of the session became one of parliamentary tactics. The people's representatives were frustrated at their inability to initiate policy, make recommendations to the king, or be able even to address the king, who was advised by his ministers and could be addressed by the nobles' representatives.

At length, Teisina Fuko (number one people's representative for

Ha‘apai) proposed the establishment of a standing committee to prepare a financial statement for the Privy Council. When this proposal lost, he demanded that the government take action on the urgent issues of the civil-service salary increase, the purchase of copra from the outer-island producers, and the sealing of the vitally important Hihifo Road. As he finished speaking, he walked out of the chamber. To Fuko’s surprise, the seven other people’s representatives present in the house at the time followed him out of the chamber in an unpremeditated protest at their impotence. The walkout caused a furor: the nobles and ministers made their own protest by quickly passing eleven bills in the absence of the people’s representatives. One of the representatives returned the next day, and another a few days later. The remaining six stayed out for fourteen days, the maximum they could absent themselves without provoking their own dismissal (*Matangi Tonga* 4, no. 4 [September-October 1989]: 12-16).

The significance of the walkout is that it attracted popular attention to the role of the people’s representatives and to the issues that they were trying to pursue in parliament. Two views about the role of representatives were put forward: one, that they were in parliament to cooperate with the government and to contribute to a consensus approval for the government’s actions; and two, that they were there to be a watchdog for the people and to ensure that the government conformed to acceptable standards of political morality. This also implied that they should have the power to initiate policy. The latter view obviously implied the need for constitutional change, since a minority in parliament was only a watchdog on a short leash.

It was at this point that serious public discussion began about the options for political change. The word “revolution” began to be used, but in warning rather than in advocacy.

Early in 1988, *Matangi Tonga* had published interviews with ten MPs. Three of the people’s representatives expressed politically conservative views, indicating a concern mainly for economic development and for fair treatment. One of these members said that each of the three groups in parliament should have equal representation, a statement with which a noble representative agreed. From the liberal representatives came statements such as: the unbalanced representation causes frustration, the government cannot be trusted to be honest, the wishes of the majority are overlooked by the ruling minority. The word “dictatorship” was used by more than one. One advocated opening ministerial appointments to the elected members. The necessity for an official opposition was urged by Viliami Afeaki, “to balance the authority.” The

three most outspoken members--Niu, Pohiva, and Fuko--gave diverse views. Pohiva said that his role in politics was not to have roads built but to improve the system of government, "the root of all our problems." For him, simply increasing popular representation was not enough--government had to be handed over to the people's representatives. Niu said that he was a Tongan traditionalist, believing in Tupou I's system, which at present just happened not to be working properly: the people's and nobles' representatives were supposed to be a check on the king. He expressed opposition to importing a foreign form of democracy, asking, perhaps with irony, "Can you imagine letting just an ordinary person rule this country?" He even recommended that coup-riven Fiji should have a monarchy as the solution to its problems. Fuko urged a new system of representation, "for the sake of this country and its development. . . . It is very dangerous to go on like this, and we should change with the times rather than be forced to change. We should not bring in tradition to hamper development. Let development flourish with tradition as an integral part of it." This view was echoed by his colleague from Ha'apai, who declared himself a royalist but nevertheless favored change: change would help to preserve tradition, not abolish it (*Matangi Tonga* 3, no. 2 [March-April 1988]: 8-11).

Much as these men were advocates for change in the composition of parliament and probably in its rules, all advocated and expected change to be peaceful and to be implemented in accordance with the present constitution. The opinion of the prime minister (the king's brother) was that Tonga was not ready for handing power over to elected members: there was a shortage of suitable talent, which in any case ran in particular families. The important thing in politics, he stressed, was the "relationship between the king and his people," implying an intimacy and mutual understanding that made democracy redundant (*Matangi Tonga* 2, no. 3 [May-June 1987]: 34-35).

After the parliamentary walkout of September 1989, these modest and moderate opinions seemed obsolete. Sanft (representative for Vava'u) declared that the episode showed parliament had become a rubber stamp; others intimated that the government was the radical body that had deviated from the principles laid down by Tupou I and was driving the people to revolution. "Revolution," said Niu, "a violent confrontation . . . is exactly what we are trying to avoid." Constitutional change was necessary only because the government was acting without regard to the constitution: "Under Section 75 [of the constitution] our responsibility is to make sure that Ministers are doing their jobs properly--if they don't then we can impeach and dismiss them.

. . . The Legislature should tell the Executive what to execute, instead of the Executive deciding for themselves what they should do" (*Matangi Tonga* 4, no. 4 [September-October 1989]: 13-14).

The conservative opinion was expressed by the Speaker of the house, denying the issues as defined by the liberals: "I have noticed during the last three years . . . that the People's Representatives have upped them. selves and they are now looking down on chiefs and Ministers" (*Matangi Tonga* 4, no. 4 [September-October 1989]: 15).

This highly publicized walkout came almost at the very end of the three-year parliamentary term and ensured a high level of tension in the approaching election. The *Tonga Chronicle* gave prominent coverage to the walkout, as did a new, independent newspaper, *The Times of Tonga.* The latter carried statements by apparently randomly selected citizens who overwhelmingly supported the walkout, and like *Matangi Tonga,* published editorials expatiating on principles of government and of the rights of the people. *Matangi Tonga* explicitly advocated "a par. liament of the people, for the people and by the people." Indeed, it may be said that the press rather than the politicians launched the election campaign: *Matangi Tonga* began publishing lengthy interviews with candidates in the December 1989 edition, the election not being due until February.

The themes stressed by the reformers in the *Matangi Tonga* interviews, however, were not proposals for radical change but merely the misuse of authority, the legitimacy of the regime, and the need to control the changes that were inevitable. The corollary of the misuse of authority was that those in authority must listen to and consult the people. Pohiva, as before, was prepared to use stronger language--suggesting that revolutions had happened before in Tonga's history and that the conditions for revolution were again being satisfied. Interviews with other candidates were also published, several of them representing extremely conservative, traditionalist views that may be summed up as "government should be left to those who know about it."

Finally, *Matangi Tonga* published an interview with the king himself. The king pointed to the dangers of democracy, citing the histories of Spain, Germany, and Russia as examples of ruthless tyrannies that had democratic origins, and warning of the dangers of coups d'état. He stressed the partnership of the three elements in parliament and finished by making an analogy with the English civil wars of the seventeenth century. In England, the people and nobles defeated the king, but in Tonga, the king and people had defeated the nobles; consequently, the king, not parliament, is the guardian of the people in Tonga. He admit-

ted that although education and travel gave people a taste for political participation, he believed that many Tongans were more concerned with their daily activities (*Matangi Tonga* 5, no. 1 [January-February 1990]: 10). If the king had been a democrat in his early life it was clear, now that there was discussion about where power should be located, that he was, on the most liberal interpretation, a believer in "guided democracy."

The 1990 Election

The election campaign of January and February 1990 was probably the first in Tongan history in which widespread bitterness became evident (for example, see *Times of Tonga,* 25 January 1990). Threats of violence were made to some candidates or their associates on a few occasions. Although deep ideological divisions were not evident in the published statements of the candidates, feelings ran high for and against the reformers (who were increasingly coming to be seen as a bloc, although no party had been formed and no declaration made of a shared "ticket" except between the two sitting members for Haʻapai) because of the walkout of September and allegations by Pohiva against the ministers of finance and police. Allegations of corruption and illegality concentrated almost entirely on these two figures in connection with several issues. The passports question was emotive because of the alleged unaccountability of the proceeds and because it suggested (falsely) to many people that large numbers of foreigners were being sold citizenship with its accompanying rights to reside and own land. The parliamentary salaries and allowances issue suggested to many people, at a time when public-service salary increases were delayed and copra growers were not being paid at all, that the government and nobles were both corrupt and inefficient. Just as these beliefs aroused indignation about the government, so too did they arouse indignation about those who had brought these things to public attention and thereby appeared to be threatening Tongan stability and traditions of respect.

Pohiva, though not in an intellectual or charismatic sense a leader of this movement, was probably the best known because of his outspokenness and the publicity surrounding the litigation over his dismissal in 1985. It was he, also, who had made the biggest noise about overtime payments in 1986 and had kept the issue alive since, even to the extent of refusing to accept overtime payments to which he was entitled. Pohiva was the man most seen as being dangerous to the regime (or as the champion of popular rights) and therefore became the target of a

smear campaign intended to discredit him. This campaign portrayed him as a revolutionary, even as a communist, and made much of his refusal to accept overtime payments. The allegation was made that his attempt first to refuse the money and then to have it allocated for scholarship purposes amounted to an electoral bribe.[14] Far from discrediting Pohiva, these allegations gave him enormous publicity and forced him to defend himself, which he did most effectively in public meetings in most of the villages of Tongatapu.

A new and final note of controversy was introduced into the campaign when *Kele'a,* the occasional paper that had become popular as an authoritative exposer of government misdeeds, brought out a new edition about a week before the election. An editorial drew parallels between the Tongan constitutional crisis of 1904 and the situation in 1990, revealed that the smear campaign against Pohiva had been directed "from above," and published a long interview with that widely known, rationalist critic of authority, Futa Helu. Helu expounded the principles of the constitution, democracy, and justice; explained the. political issues of the previous few years; and finally, in answer to a question, named the candidates whom he favored, describing them variously as honest, truth-loving, well-educated, experienced, courageous, and eloquent. He concluded with a warning that if others were elected, Tonga's future would be troubled (*Kele'a* 5, no. 2 [February 1990]).

The election was a victory for the reformers in general and for Pohiva in particular. In being elected number one representative for Tongatapu, Pohiva won almost twice the votes as the previous winner had in 1987. Three-quarters of the voters on Tongatapu voted in his favor. The electorate clearly identified Pohiva, Niu, and Viliami Fukofuka (the publisher of *Kele'a*) as a team, and voted for them solidly; Fukofuka, coming in at number three, won twice as many votes as the fourth candidate, Sione M. Lemoto, who was number one in the previous election.[15] In Ha'apai, the two previous members, Teisina Fuko and Viliami Afeaki, were reelected, each scoring about twice the vote of the next candidate, himself a former parliamentarian. In Vava'u, both sitting members had adopted a reformist stance but were rejected in favor of Havea Katoa, a copublisher of *Kele'a,* as number one, and Siale Faletau for number two.

On 'Eua, voters were cautious, rejecting the sitting member who at the time of the parliamentary walkout had dissociated himself from the reformers; the candidate who was identified with the reformers, however, was not elected. Similarly, on Niuafo'ou and Niuatoputapu, remote from the main centers of population, voters rejected both the sit-

ting member and the reformist candidate favored by Helu (one of his former students). The delay over copra purchases probably accounted for the unpopularity of the sitting member, while many voters possibly looked with rural suspicion on the "unseemly" behavior of the people in the capital and rejected the man connected with it.

Conclusions

The election outcome was clearly a vote for change, but change of a very conservative sort. The recorded public statements of the reformers repeatedly stressed particular matters of corruption or wrongdoing that they said they were trying to have redressed. This was especially convincing in the case of Pohiva, the man whom the Supreme Court judged to have been unfairly treated. *Kele'a*, moreover, had confined its allegations to matters of fact that could be verified from public documents. Neither *Kele'a* nor the politicians had attempted to attack the consensus about national goals, which generally endorsed the government's pro-development policies. Indeed, policies were not part of the debate at all, although procedures of implementation sometimes were. The reformers therefore were able to concentrate on the discrepancies between government practice and the much-revered constitution, representing themselves as defenders of the latter, of the heritage of Tupou I, as well as champions of the popular will. In this strategy, they were enormously assisted by the emergence of an independent and liberal press with the formation of *Matangi Tonga* (bimonthly) in 1986 and *The Times of Tonga* (weekly) in 1989, which not only gave the people more information than they could possibly have received before but also provided their own advocacy in favor of liberalism. The radio broadcasts of parliamentary proceedings that began in 1986 were also popular and no doubt helped to raise the level of popular awareness.

It is thus premature to regard the events of the period 1987 to 1989 as marking a radical new departure in Tonga politics. The advocates of reform are the heirs to an undercurrent of discontent that has never been far from the surface in Tongan politics, muted though that undercurrent was between 1941 and 1965. It is clear, however, that the social changes of the 1970s and 1980s, coming on top of the acute population growth of the 1950s and 1960s, have brought the sense of discontent to a culmination, which, if reform does not come, may shortly lead to a qualitative change. Events immediately following the election of 1990 suggest that the royal and noble oligarchy was disposed to resist change rather than accommodate it.

At present, there seems nothing peculiarly Polynesian or uniquely Tongan about this process. Stress and modernization alike lead to demands for participation in power; the trigger in this case was the abuse of power and the perception of government dishonesty, rather than matters of policy as such. Indeed, the leading actors in Tonga's political contest are not divided by economic issues or economic philosophy but by newly discovered political principles. However, as Futa Helu and others warned before the election, if modest appeals for justice are not met, then more extreme events will follow. Conversely, all that is necessary to avert the dire outcomes extravagantly predicted by foreign journalists is a few minor reforms that would persuade the people of the integrity and honor of their hereditary leaders.

NOTES

1. There are thirty-three noble titles, but some descent lines have failed and others have merged so that the number of titleholders was only twenty-seven at the time of the 1990 election; three titles were unallocated.

2. Seats are distributed as follows: Tongatapu, three seats as a single, multimember electorate; Ha'apai and Vava'u, two seats each on the same basis; 'Eua, one seat; and Niuafo'ou and Niuatoputapu, one seat between them. The same formula applies to both nobles' and people's representation.

3. The cabinet was enlarged to six in 1915, when the governors of Ha'apai and Vava'u were included, and was increased to nine in 1919. By 1932 it had declined to seven. The appointment of the crown prince as minister of education in 1943 made the number eight, although one position, that of the chief justice, was vacant and ceased to carry cabinet membership in 1944. Subsequent additions to the ministry took place in 1970, 1974, 1979, 1988, and 1990.

4. Women did not exercise this new right until the election of 1960, and it may be wondered how many do so even today: in the important elections of 1987 and 1990, only slightly more than half the number of registered voters voted.

5. The king's speeches on the opening and closing of parliament each year are published in the *Tonga Government Gazette.* In recent years they have also been published in the *Tonga Chronicle.*

6. I do not have detailed data on previous elections, but believe the number of candidates to have been normally lower than this. The number of candidates for nine seats in later elections was thirty-one in 1984, fifty-five in 1987, and fifty-five in 1990.

7. It had been the practice since 1885 that the president of the church was also appointed royal chaplain. When Havea went to Fiji, he was succeeded in both positions by Mo'ungaloa, but when he defeated Mo'ungaloa for the church presidency in 1983, the latter remained as chaplain, a fact widely understood as signifying regal disapproval of Havea's outspoken advocacy of reform.

3. The king's utilitarian educational philosophy is clearly indicated in his speeches opening and closing parliament over many years.

9. Of a total of 3,800 established civil-service positions in 1989, 265 were held by university graduates.

10. The population, in 1966 expected to reach 102,000 by 1976, had in fact reached only 90,000 by that date. At the 1986 census the population was only 96,000. At the end of 1989 the population was officially estimated to be 90,485.

11. Personal income tax was reduced to a flat rate of 10 percent. Companies were to pay 20 percent income tax on profits under T$100,000, and 30 percent on profits over that amount. A general retail sales tax of 5 percent was levied. This shift in the burden of taxation was widely resented and resulted in two petitions of protest, one of them with 11,000 signatures (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, January 1987; *Matangi Tonga* 1, no. 1 [September-October 1986]: 3-4).

12. The basic salary for a member of parliament at the time was T$10,000 per annum. Additional allowances increased this substantially.

13. This paragraph, and those that follow, take the political record mainly as reported in *Matangi Tonga* for 1987 to 1989, supported by information from the *Tonga Chronicle* for the same period.

14. These allegations (among others) were used after the election as the basis of a Supreme Court challenge to Pohiva's election, but the chief justice found him not guilty of all charges and duly elected. The text of the judgment is given in the *Tonga Chronicle*, 25 May 1990.

15. On Tongatapu, there were 23,796 names on the electoral roll, of whom 12,907 voted, casting up to three votes each; 9,441 voted for Pohiva, 9,402 for Niu and 7,259 for Fukofuka. Lemoto won only 2,630. The three winners among them polled more than double the votes for all other candidates combined. The detailed election results were published in the *Tonga Chronicle*, 23 February 1990.

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