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INTRODUCTION

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Not so very long ago it was a commonplace for commentators to describe the contemporary Pacific as a wholly stable, indeed tranquil region, one far removed from the conflicts and collisions so characteristic of other parts of the globe. Despite the scholarly trappings that often surrounded such a view, this perspective expressed a vision as romantic in its own way as many earlier perceptions had proved to be. Repeatedly, it seems, an impulse appears to arise, among intellectuals and travelers alike, overcoming critical thought, an impulse determined to assign various social, cultural, economic, and political blessings corresponding to those gifts of scenery and climate that are the region's natural and indisputable inheritance.

Now in the late 1980s, however, there is much less talk about a "Pacific way." From the viewpoint of the international relations specialist, for instance, ample evidence exists of the region's growing salience to significant powers on its periphery and beyond. As for regional groupings, those based on affinities of ethnicity and interest are increasingly assuming roles incompatible with the inclinations of more formal, all-encompassing associations. The nation-states themselves, too, have begun to develop larger, more complex patterns of interaction, with each other, within and towards various international political institutions, and, perhaps most importantly, with larger and more powerful actors in the international arena.

This increasingly variegated international political activity makes it

more difficult, of course, for observers to offer useful generalizations about the political behavior of the region as a whole. Equally, examination of the domestic or internal politics of Pacific island entities confirms that in that sphere, too, earlier perceptions about the continuity of harmonious political arrangements were somewhat premature. From every angle, in fact, it is evident that an era in Pacific political history has drawn to a close.

Naturally these sorts of developments offer challenges to those--never many--with a professional scholarly interest in Pacific political affairs. By its very nature, the subject matter of this special issue of *Pacific Studies*--political change in the Pacific--precludes presentation of any final words on its topic. What this issue does provide, however, are several studies from experienced academics with lengthy backgrounds of involvement with their particular field of interest. Each of them, moreover, retains a commitment to original, independent inquiry, as well as a vivid sense of the limited power of earlier work fully to describe, explain, and interpret ongoing Pacific political processes.

The ways in which political change may come about are many, of course, particularly when the meaning of "politics" is taken in its largest sense. Within a more restricted or conventional approach, however, the repertoire of options is not especially vast. It encompasses elections, with emphasis on the peaceful transfer of formal power, but takes in other means as well, such as assassination and coups. Within this necessarily brief issue all of these approaches to political change make their appearance. Clark and Shuster separately analyze developments that together seem particularly grim. In each essay, bright hopes fade, and great promise goes unfulfilled, as assassination and other forms of political violence make a mockery of more soothing rhetoric about the democratic prospect. Tagupa and Lal, in turn, approach what has become a succession of coups in Fiji. Here, the rules of political engagement have altered dramatically, and perhaps irrevocably, in the very nation whose political leadership earlier sought so self-consciously to promote a distinctively "Pacific way" embodying consensual problem-solving styles of governance.

Each of the four authors explores events whose common feature is a shared predisposition to travel down extra-constitutional paths towards a deeply felt political end. In every case, at some stage in the drama, some procedure to discover public preferences about alternative outcomes has been followed, with elections or referenda or both playing conspicuous roles in Fiji, Palau, and New Caledonia. Indeed, the number and frequency of referenda in Palau, on a question whose essential

character has not altered from one electoral occasion to the next, quite probably establishes a perhaps unsurpassable record. The essay by Rogers, too, looks at elections and referenda, within the context of competing aspirations among ethnic groups. In this respect, divergent responses toward moves to redefine Guam's political status, and reshape its government's structure and capacities, reflect rivalries and struggles dissimilar in degree, but not in kind, from those found in the other political entities examined in this issue.

Thus this issue looks at elections and their aftermath in four Pacific island locations. Elsewhere in the Pacific, inherited Western forms continue the inescapable process of acquiring indigenous content, different from one place to the next, arising out of each entity's particular needs and circumstances. In virtually every setting, in fact, as in some ways befits a healthy polity, solutions to far-reaching questions about the nature of political leadership, procedures for discussion and change, and the scope of government power--the perennial issues of politics--are proving as difficult to settle, definitively, and as elusive in the Pacific as anywhere else.