

# Tok Blong SPPF

A Quarterly of News and Views on the Pacific Islands

October 1988 #25



photo by Elaine Briere

*Western Samoa*

*Elaine Briere*

## Journalist David Robie Interviewed on Fiji, Riots in Vanuatu ... and more

- Also ... Backgrounder on death of Palau's President*
- ... Tahitian Conference Challenges France*
- ... Positive Steps in Kanaky/New Caledonia*
- ... Changes in Tonga*



# SPPF UPDATE

One of our supporters writes us, "Could one page of **Tok Blong** be devoted to what you are doing in Canada - tid-bits of information by way of a 'counterpart' to the news on the Pacific islands?" Well, to partially answer him .....

In February, 1988 SPPF hosted the annual meeting of the Canadian support network of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement. Thirty-four representatives from a variety of organizations met for two and one half days near Vancouver, B.C. for networking, updating on Pacific events and planning strategies for the coming year. This year's meeting included summary reports of the fifth Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific conference held in Manila, the Philippines in November of 1987. Phil Esmonde from SPPF, Michael Nicol of the Haida Nation and Nilak Butler from the International Indian Treaty Council each gave their perspective of that meeting.

The NFIP Canadian support network meeting was followed by the "**Building the Web**" conference, a joint Canadian-American venture held in Seattle, Washington in July. SPPF was instrumental in assisting over the last year the organizing of the three day meeting. The conference consisted of one public day of panels, keynote speakers and workshops. The next two days, specifically for organizers

working on Asia-Pacific issues, were attended by 65 people from Alaska to southern California. The purpose of the meeting was to make more efficient the networking, information sharing, and resource use, including speakers, up and down the Pacific coast of North America. Phil Esmonde of SPPF acted as one of the two facilitators.

In between those two conferences SPPF held a gigantic garage sale. It was our first attempt at such a fundraising event and under the direction of two conveners (one of whom is now in the Solomon Islands with CUSO), SPPF volunteers and staff raised \$1200. Besides making a substantial and welcome contribution to the postage costs (!), the event served to bring to the attention of the public South Pacific issues and the existence of SPPF. We'd like to again thank the many Victoria SPPF members who made this event such a success.

As well as the fund raiser, on May 14 SPPF sponsored a local event to mark the anniversary of the first Fiji coup. Dr. Michael Howard, then teaching at the University of British Columbia, spoke to an audience in Victoria, B.C. Dr. Howard, who taught at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji for almost 5 years and knew members of the overthrown government,

## About this newsletter . . .

TOK BLONG SPPF is pidgin english as used in many parts of the Pacific. It might literally be translated as "this talk belongs to SPPF" or, SPPF Newsletter. TOK BLONG SPPF is published four times per year by the South Pacific Peoples Foundation of Canada, 409-620 View St., Victoria, B.C., Canada V8W 1J6, and is available to donors of SPPF (minimum \$10 yr.). SPPF exists to raise critical issues in the South Pacific to a Canadian audience through a variety of public education methods, and to assist in getting relevant Canadian financial, technical and other assistance into the South Pacific to assist islanders in their self-development. Partial financial support for this newsletter from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is gratefully acknowledged. We welcome readers comments on items carried in this newsletter, as well as suggestions for articles and copies of Pacific news clippings, etc, which would be of use to our work. TOK BLONG SPPF is edited by Phil Esmonde.



shared his analysis of the coups and events since.

SPPF organized and coordinated the trip to Montreal of Mr. Ben Teriitehau of Tahiti/Polynesia to be a panel speaker for the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War Congress held June 1 through 6 and attended by 2000 physicians. Mr. Teriitehau spoke emotionally of the French nuclear testing in his home islands, the continuing false economy and police structures set up to maintain the testing as well as the health, environmental and social results to Tahitians. Mr. Teriitehau made direct links with the largest trade union in Quebec and rounded out his visit by media interviews with Le Devoir, CBC Radio Canada, Radio France International, several medical journals and some smaller media outlets.

SPPF co-ordinated a speaking tour for New Zealand journalist David Robie (see interview elsewhere in this issue) the first two weeks of July. Mr. Robie, who covers the Pacific islands region, spoke in Seattle, Vancouver, Victoria and Nanose. His topic was an overview and update on South Pacific regional issues. SPPF also organized media interviews for Mr. Robie, including 45 minutes on the Rafe Mair Open Line Show in Vancouver and an interview with CKO national news radio.

SPPF helped coordinate an AS IT HAPPENS interview of Bernie Keldermans from Palau. After the president of Palau was found shot dead in his home in August, Phil Esmonde was interviewed by CKLN (Toronto) radio and commissioned by South-North News Service, syndicated widely in the U.S. and Canada, to do a background analysis and projection of events in Palau (reprinted in this issue of **Tok Blong SPPF**).

SPPF has helped to develop reading packages on the Pacific Islands for CUSO's use in educating people it sends to the region for development assignments. As well, individual and group information requests were responded to, audio-visuals lent out, and the organization continued to just keep ahead of its daily mail (averaging 10 inward and 10 outward pieces daily).

Phil Esmonde has just returned from a 4 week trip to Fiji, Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii. As a result, plans are proceeding for a hoped-for quick tour of Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, President of the FLNKS of New Caledonia. Also planned is a June 1988 tour of B.C. by Mel Togolo, the former secretary to the Premier of North Solomons Province in Papua New Guinea, who is now studying the environmental impacts of mining.

Meetings held in Hawaii should see SPPF's four fact sheets (on fisheries, tourism, health and population) possibly used in the Hawaiian school system. The fact sheets will also be included in a mailing sent to Pacific island governments.

While in Australia, Phil Esmonde was interviewed by Radio Djiido, the Kanak radio station. The interview will be translated into French and broadcast in Kanaky/New Caledonia, explaining in part what SPPF is doing in Canada to raise awareness of Pacific issues. Radio Djiido will be providing SPPF programs on cultural, historic and political themes, along with music that can be made available to various cooperative radio stations in Canada that SPPF is in touch with.

The Kanak Cultural Office in Sydney, Australia is also interested in potential cultural tours, especially those that put Kanaks in touch with native peoples, and SPPF will be investigating such possibilities.

We hope you continue to enjoy **Tok Blong SPPF**. Please do send us ideas, suggestions and feedback. Also please subscribe or renew your subscription (\$10 a year donation for individuals; \$25 for organizations). Your support is important to us.

### AMNESTY REPORT ON FIJI

A six page report on recent arrests and detentions in Fiji under the new Internal Securities Decree is available from S.P.P.F. Please send \$1.00 for xerox and postage.



# PALAU PRESIDENT'S DEATH RESULT OF ONGOING PRESSURE ON THESE STRATEGIC ISLANDS

By Phil Esmonde

The shooting death August 20 of Lazurus Salii, second president of the Pacific island nation of Palau, marks one more sad event in a high-pressure poker game focused on these strategically important islands.

Located 600 miles east of the Philippines, the Republic of Palau has a population of 14,000, consists of more than 100 islands, and forms part of the geographic and ethnic cluster of Pacific islands known as Micronesia. Since 1947, Palau has also formed part of the United Nations mandated Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, with the United States designated as the Trust Territories administering power.

At first administered by the U.S. Navy, since 1951 the Trust Territory has come under responsibility of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Currently Palau, also referred to as Belau, receives over 90 percent of its budget as a direct subsidy from, and is a virtual dependency of, the United States.

While other parts of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands have approved and implemented new political relationships with the United States — the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia are now "freely associated states", while the Northern Mariana Islands has commonwealth status with the U.S. — Palau's future political relationship with the United States has yet to be settled.

The majority of Palauans wish to be in free association with the U.S. under an agreement known as the Compact of Free

Association (COFA), but they refuse to overrule a unique clause in their 1979 constitution which bars all nuclear, chemical and biological substances used for warfare from Palau unless 75 percent of the population expressly approve such use in a referendum.

An important — and to the United States non-negotiable — part of the COFA is U.S. military options. Under the currently negotiated agreement, the U.S. has options on almost one-third of Palauan land for use as a jungle warfare training center, as practice areas for amphibious landings, and for the building of a new airstrip and storage area. Observers also believe that the U.S. has eyes on Palau's natural deepwater harbour which faces onto the China Sea and would make a perfect forward staging area for the U.S. Trident submarine fleet. In return for these military options — often interpreted by U.S. officials as part of their obligation to defend Palau — Palau would receive \$US 450 million over a 15 year period to be used for development projects and government financing.

The U.S. government has insisted that the COFA and its resulting funding package is unacceptable unless U.S. military requirements are met. As if to underscore this, William J. Crowe, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently told U.S. Congress that Palau would probably be the principal replacement if American forces had to leave the Philippines.

Because American military designs on Palau include bringing nuclear powered and armed vessels and possibly armed aircraft



into Palau, they run directly against Palau's constitution, the first nuclear free constitution in the world.

The contradiction between the COFA and the constitution, the attractiveness to the Palau government and majority of people of a huge cash flow if the free association agreement goes through, and the financial dependency of Palau on the United States have been major elements in focusing intense pressure on the small Pacific nation.

In the less than ten years since Palau's nuclear free constitution was passed by an overwhelming 92 percent of the people, Palauans have been forced nine times to vote, in one form or another, on whether to overturn the nuclear provisions of their constitution in favour of the Compact agreement. Most of the referenda have been rushed, and thousands of dollars spent on questionable voter education.

This process of wearing down the people of Palau either to have your strategic interests met — if you are the United States — or to secure funds for your financially strapped country — if you are the President of Palau — has taken its toll. While support for the Compact agreement has gone as high as 73 percent — it requires 75 percent to meet constitutional requirements — violence and social and cultural disintegration have ensued, with this process quickened under the administration of President Salii.

Salii's death by a 357 magnum revolver is presumably by his own hand, according to results of an official autopsy.

While some sources indicate that President Salii, 54 years old, had been suffering from depression lately, others claim he was in good spirits.

However, there is a confluence of several major events which placed incredible pressure on Mr. Salii in recent months.

Under direction of a Congressional Subcommittee, the U.S. General Accounting Office recently conducted an investigation into fiscal management in Palau. While the GAO's report has yet to be made

public, some findings have been released. These include the fact that President Salii took a \$200,000 payment from International Power Systems Company Ltd. (IPSECO) of London, England, to assist it in building a controversial power plant in Palau.

The plant is controversial because it cost \$US 32 million (considered to be twice its value), was located miles from the capital city of Koror (but close to a potential U.S. military site), was built to a capacity that was well beyond the needs of Palau for the foreseeable future, and was not economically viable.

President Salii had steered the IPSECO power plant issue through the Palauan Senate and House of Delegates approval process claiming it was economically viable. The loan for the plant was provided to Palau by an international consortium of banks after receiving a telegram from U.S. officials involved in negotiating the Compact agreement with Palau indicating that the Compact agreement, when approved, would cover the costs.

On this basis loans were secured and the power plant built. Subsequently IPSECO went into liquidation and Palau defaulted on its payments to the consortium. After a lengthy court case in New York City, and less than two weeks before Salii's death, Palau was found guilty of default and ordered to pay the consortium \$US 44 million, a staggering amount for such a small nation.

Added to this loss of prestige over the IPSECO affair, President Salii was - in absentia - raked over the coals this July by U.S. Representative Ron deLugo during hearings by the Interior Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs, held in Washington.





Witnesses at the hearing suggest that mounting evidence of corruption by the Salii administration was alluded to. Also, Mr. deLugo was reported to be infuriated at Mr. Salii for reversing himself on an agreement the two were said to have reached in Hawaii in June. Under the agreement, the Compact document would be amended to ensure that offices for a special prosecutor and auditor were set up in Palau, meeting Mr. deLugo's concerns about fiscal mismanagement and reports that Palau has become a major transshipment point for Asian heroin on its way to the United States.

Mr. deLugo also said at the hearings that the GAO would return to Palau to continue its investigation. This return was blocked by the Salii government.

Palau's Washington representative, Haruo Willter, arrived in Palau the day before Mr. Salii's death, and was seen riding in a car with Salii the morning of his death. Mr. Willter was likely giving Salii a full briefing on both the deLugo hearings and the IPSECO New York trial.

A further blow to Mr. Salii's credibility came from the state elections in Koror. One of 16 states in Palau, Koror is the largest with half the nation's population, and includes the capital city. In the elections held in the second week of August, 12 of the 17 seats went to those considered pro-constitutional. In Salii's eyes, these would be people considered anti-Compact and obstructing the future of Palau.

The Koror state elections may have served as a bellweather to Salii who, the day after his death, was scheduled to announce his candidacy for re-election in the upcoming November elections.

The second highest vote-getter in Koror was Isabella Sumang, one of the younger Palauan women leaders. Sumang is a symbol of the women of Palau who recently took the President to court over an August 1987 constitutional amendment and subsequent plebiscite on the Compact agreement. In April this year, the Palau Supreme Court found the amendment process to be illegal, and the resulting plebiscite which approved the COFA with less than 75 percent was therefore "null and void".

This was a major setback to Salii and the U.S. administration. In July 1987, Salii brought about a virtual state of anarchy in Palau when he layed off 60 percent of the civil service stating that there was no money to pay them because the Compact was not approved. A gang of civil servants formed a "furlough committee", camped outside the Palauan Congress, and threatened legislators until they passed Salii's bills on the constitutional amendment, since found illegal.

When Palau Speaker of the House, Santos Olikong, appeared before Representative deLugo's committee 14 months ago he stated he voted for the legislation, "only because I feared for my life.". His testimony was ignored by U.S. legislators. This July, Mr. deLugo apologized for not then believing him.

[When Mr. Olikong returned to Palau in September 1987 after a month in Guam for his own safety, his house was shot at. A former aide to President Salii was found guilty of the shooting earlier this year.]

In September 1987, the women leaders of Palau had to drop their legal case against validity of the forced-through constitutional amendment because of fear for their lives. One leader had her house firebombed, while another's father was murdered outside his son's legal office. In an unprecedented statement, the judge in the case stated his concern that the withdrawal was under coercion, and indicated that the women could bring the case forth again. The Judge's comments were criticized by the Palauan government.

Despite what the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists called "a breakdown of the rule of law" in Palau between July-September 1987, and despite a court challenge to the constitutionality of the Compact approval process being dropped because of murder and intimidation, the United States kept a "hands-off" approach. The Reagan administration was quick to accept that the Compact approval process was complete in Palau, and instigated moves for implementation legislation to proceed through the U.S. congressional system.

Events in Palau very much have to do with the mounting pressure brought to bear on the Palauan government and its citizens



to ensure that the policy interests of the U.S. not be denied. With upcoming negotiations with the Philippines government concerning U.S. bases in that country, U.S. officials would like to have Palau assured as the identified 'principal replacement'.



photo by Charlie Scheiner

VOTING DURING ONE OF THE MANY PLEBESCIDES

The United States, as the administering agency entrusted since 1947 by the United Nations to ".... promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territory, and their progressive development towards self government or independence..." has been eager to see the Compact agreement accepted in Palau.

Successive U.S. administrations and their policy-makers on Micronesia have successfully deflected any criticism of their actions, while overseeing the social and economic disintegration of Palau. The United States has been successful in negotiating agreements with three of the four parts of the Trust Territory giving the U.S. lengthy military use options in exchange for massive funding packets over a 15 year period. Palau remains the missing part in what the U.S. has called a military "fallback arc".

The little known engine of U.S. policy in Micronesia may be a report authored by banker Anthony Solomon in 1963

at the request of President John F. Kennedy. The Solomon Report was intended to investigate ways to ensure the Pacific islands encompassing the Trust Territory remained under U.S. influence and that U.S. strategic interests were maintained.

In its own words, the still confidential Solomon Report is described as "an integrated master plan" meant to ensure favourable outcomes in referenda held in Micronesia on future political status with the United States. Among its recommendations were extending the Peace Corp program to the area, introducing a U.S. oriented school curriculum, and extension of social security, health care, postal services, etc.

While current U.S. officials state that the classified Solomon Report never became official policy, they have never denied the premise by which the report was undertaken, and as written in the report itself: "The Washington policy, adopted last year [i.e. 1962], of having the Trust Territory permanently with the United States..."

For its part, the United Nations, ultimately responsible for the Trust Territory and U.S. administration of it, has continually abrogated that responsibility, and has taken a narrow view of events in Palau and the rest of Micronesia. It is revealing that in the May 1988 U.N. Trusteeship Council meetings, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas sent a government delegation to request the U.N. not terminate the Trusteeship agreement for the Pacific Islands, and requesting U.N. help in having the United States live up to its part of the agreement reached between the Marianas and the United States.

But what next for Palau? It seems unlikely that the Compact agreement will be approved before presidential elections in both Palau and the United States this November.

There is a possibility that a legal constitutional amendment process will be started in Palau in order to void the nuclear free provision of the constitution as it relates to the Compact agreement. Thus the agreement would only need 50 percent approval, not 75 percent.



A key to Palau's future rests with the women leaders. As a matrilineal society, women traditionally chose those who were to be the chiefs. While under U.S. guidance American-styled legislative and executive systems of government have been set up, traditional systems have still retained some power.

Through the charged atmosphere surrounding the conflict between the constitution and the Compact, traditional and modern systems have clashed.

Over the last year the traditional system — the women's decision to challenge the government proven right by the court — has gained stature, while the modern system, which gave in to threats and intimidation last year, has lost some of its credibility.

However, being almost totally dependent on the United States economically, receiving over 90 percent of government funds from the U.S., having over 60 percent of Palauan wage earners

dependent on these funds, and having had little in the way of assistance in economic development, the \$US 450 million is very, very attractive to most Palauans.

In the words of Palau Supreme Court Justice Robert Heffner in his April 22, 1988 ruling invalidating the 1987 constitutional amendment:

" Approval of the Compact is a prerequisite for substantial funding which, it is presumed, will bring almost immediate gratification to a large majority of the citizens of the Republic. But tomorrow's lucre pales in the face of today's recognition of the integrity and stability of the constitution of the Republic. "

The violent deaths of both the first and second presidents of Palau, the 1987 state of violence, intimidation and murder, and the ongoing tension between traditional and modern systems of decision-making are constant reminders to Palauans of the cost of that "lucre".

## OLOMANA PLAYS AN SPPF BENEFIT - SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 1989 -

Olomana, a group that has played an important role in the development of Hawaiian contemporary music, will play a two hour benefit in support of SPPF's work. The concert will be at the University Centre Auditorium in Victoria— a setting renown for its accoustical quality.

Founded over a decade ago as a duo featuring Jerry Santos and Robert Beaumont, Olomana's first record **Like a Seabird in the Wind** has become a classic. After Robert died, the group reformed, with Jerry teaming with Haunani Apoliona and bass player Wally Suenaga. Jerry's background is rock bands and coffeehouse folk music. Haunani has a masters degree in social work and has been very involved in bringing social services oriented to indigenous Hawaiians under Hawaiian control. She has recently served as the President of the Hawaiian Business Association and hosts a weekly Hawaiian language radio show. What united these two seemingly disparate individuals is their commitment to writing and performing songs which articulate the importance that the land holds for indigenous Hawaiians.

Through songs that are gentle yet powerful, Olomana has crafted a body of very special contemporary Hawaiian music which, while rooted in the Hawaiian linguistic and musical tradition (although they also sing in English) deal with a series of aspects of contemporary Hawaiian life.



# ROBIE ON CURRENT PACIFIC ISSUES - AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

David Robie is a New Zealand freelance journalist who has been covering the Pacific Islands for the last ten years. Currently he writes for, among others, The Dominion and Sunday Times in New Zealand, The Australian, Pacific Islands Monthly and Gemini News Service. For several years David Robie was a lead writer for Islands Business. He has been a journalist for 23 years, having worked in Australia, South Africa (where he was stripped of his residency status because of his writings on apartheid), Kenya, and France where he was on staff at Agence France Presse. He has also served as Foreign Editor of the Auckland Star.

The following interview with David Robie was conducted by Phil Esmonde of SPPF in Victoria, B.C. in July 1988.

PE: There is concern expressed by some governments in the region, especially Australia, and to an extent New Zealand, about a Libyan connection in the Pacific - that Khaddafi is making his presence known in the Pacific more and more. The Australian government closed the Libyan Peoples' Bureau in the last year and during recent riots in Vanuatu Australia immediately came out and said that the Libyans were to blame. In newspaper reports about the situation in Kanaky/New Caledonia it's often stated that the Kanak militants were trained in Libya. So there is a lot of expression about a Libyan connection and influence in the Pacific. From your travelling in the Pacific - you have worked closely with people in New Caledonia and Vanuatu - what do you make of "a Libyan connection" in the Pacific? What are we to make of this?

DR: This is a gross exaggeration. It is largely irresponsible media reporting coming from certain quarters and also very

irresponsible statements made by a number of politicians without any evidence to back the sort of claims that they have been making. I am thinking particularly of the Australian government which has been the major culprit. There have been, to my knowledge, at least four or five occasions when Bob Hawke has dragged up the Libyan bogey in the Pacific and has never produced any shred of evidence to substantiate the sort of things that he's been saying.

It is certainly true that there have been some Libyan links. There have been some political activists of various kinds from certain Pacific nations, particularly Vanuatu, Kanaky and elsewhere that have gone to Libya, attended conferences, and have had some kind of training. In the case of Vanuatu that was described as "journalism". The visits have always been relatively brief and too much has been read into them. In the case of Kanaky, most of the militants that have been to Libya are from one particular party which is a member of the FLNKS (Kanak National Socialist Liberation Front), Yann Celene Uregei's FULK party, one of the smallest and least influential. In the case of Vanuatu, most of the militants that have been to Libya are followers of Barak Sope, the rebel former cabinet minister who was accused of inciting the land riot in May. Certainly in none of these cases can these people be said to be in positions of crucial influence in political developments.

PE: When you say "some" activists have gone, how many are "some"?

DR: Probably talking about less than 50 for the entire Pacific. Seventeen or so have been from Kanaky and they are from a small party. There was a lot made by the former French Pons administration that the



hostage taking events on Ouvea were by Libyan trained militants. But in actual fact, that wasn't so. There were, to my knowledge, two who had been to Libya. Most of the militants on Ouvea had actually received French military training in normal national military service.

**PE: Why is Australia continually pushing this Libyan bogey?**

DR: It wants very much to maintain considerable influence in the Pacific and by constantly producing this bogey justifies its own presence and pressure within the region and also it distracts people in Australia from their own domestic problems.



photo by David Robie

ANTI-INDEPENDENCE RALLY IN KANAKY/NEW CALEDONIA: SPURRED ON BY "THE LIBYAN THREAT"?

**PE: In raising this Libyan bogey all the time, is the Australian government actually feeding some of the right wing conservative hysteria, especially in places like New Caledonia, about the Libyan connection. Do you have any evidence to suggest that the Australian government through its intelligence service or other means has been planting stories about Libya?**

DR: I think there is considerable evidence that the three major intelligence organizations that advise the Australian government have in fact been planting all sorts of disinformation and outright lies about Libyan involvement in the Pacific. One example that springs to mind immediately is a long article which appeared in Penthouse Magazine at the beginning of last year - Australian Penthouse Magazine that is - supposedly written by a journalist who had some

knowledge of "terrorist" affairs. But this particular journalist is not particularly widely known in the region at all and the sort of information that came out in this article was preposterous. He didn't name people, but he indicated that his sources were the Australian security and intelligence organization, ASIO.

It was clear that he was being used to disseminate disinformation. What he was claiming was that two Libyan agents were involved during the 1982 election in Fiji to destabilize the Ratu Mara government and that they had been paid something like \$300,000 to take to Fiji to back the National Federation Party. There is absolutely no evidence of this whatsoever. But the story also claimed that because the plot had failed one of Khadaffi's two agents that had been sent had been executed and that the other one had not gone back to Libya and that he was the one who was passing on the information.

There was a lot of other information in the article about Libyan involvement in Kanaky, just total disinformation, and yet much of this information was picked up by mainstream newspapers in Australia and carried as if it was genuine, with very little attempt at checking the information or even challenging the assumptions that had been made in the information.

This is classic media disinformation. You start off with a publication that has reasonable profile, use a journalist that has close connections with the intelligence services, and then simply plant a story that on the face of it could seem rather plausible. The rest of the media pick it up and before long it becomes accepted as fact, while in actual fact there is not a shred of truth behind it.

Just before the first Fijian coup one of the newsmagazines in the region, Islands Business, carried a full page article summarizing what this author had said in the Penthouse article with a picture of Khadaffi and so on. After the first coup many Fijian soldiers had photocopies of this article. It was at the time when the Fijian military were suggesting all sorts of Libyan involvement with the Bavadra government.



PE: And that was one of the public rationales for the coup, that's my understanding.

DR: Yes, exactly.

PE: Let's talk about the media in the Pacific. You have written an article that analyzes the way the media is being bought up in the Pacific, partially by the Australian Murdoch empire. You also suggested that French interests were trying to buy the Fiji Sun, the newspaper that was critical of the coup and thus was shut down by the military. Rather than censor itself, the Sun decided that it would not reopen. What has been happening in the last few months since your article at the beginning of 1988 in terms of media ownership and media manipulation?

DR: Well this process has certainly continued. The French media interests are representing the Robert Hersant group, the French domestic equivalent of Rupert Murdoch and owner of a string of right wing newspapers in France as well as 41 percent of Les Nouvelles-Caledoniennes, a very strident anti-independence right wing publication in New Caledonia. That financial interest is involved in a company which has tried - and almost succeeded - to take control of the Fiji Sun.

There have been rumours that those same interests have tried to gain control of other publications in the region. They basically would like to have an English language publication that has some influence in the region. As I see it, French interests are trying to divide South Pacific countries, to undermine the unity of the South Pacific Forum and to erode opposition to French nuclear testing and to the French colonial presence in the region.

PE: The French government has provided loans to Fiji of, I believe, Fijian 14 million dollars just after the second coup. It seems obvious that it is trying to buy influence from Fiji and is seeing an opportunity to get involved more closely with a Pacific island country that is obviously resource rich and that will have some clout. No matter what happens in Fiji, it will be a key player in the Pacific islands. What has been the impact, from what you can gather, from

that loan by the French government in terms of Fijian support for France in the Pacific?

DR: There seems to be an ambivalence by Fiji. Certainly the Bavadra Coalition people consider very much that Fiji is being bought. But Colonel Rabuka has made some public statements that have given support to the Kanak struggle. There is, though, a very wide belief that this is only rhetoric, that in fact the regime - the interim government - will be far more sympathetic to France in the future. Fiji always was a crucial country, even when the Kanak Independence Front (predecessor to the FLNKS) was lobbying for support from the South Pacific Forum years ago. Fiji was the country that most balked at giving them support and when that changed - at the 1986 Suva South Pacific Forum meeting - then it suddenly all fell into place and the moves to get Kanaky reinscribed in the United Nations Decolonization List went ahead.

Clearly France now sees that it is able to reverse that process by having such a crucial country as Fiji on its side.

It has apparently already won over the Cook Islands to some extent and is working very hard on Western Samoa. France has basically made considerable gains right through Polynesia. It hasn't had any success in the Melanesian countries but it looks upon Fiji as in effect being part of the Polynesian influence area rather than the Melanesian. France also sees Fiji as the fulcrum through which to stroke people, and this has to be seen in the context of the two organizations that are being set up: the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Polynesian Community. The latter is a backdoor way to allow French influence in the region because neither "French" Polynesia nor New Caledonia can become members of the South Pacific Forum until they are independent, but "French" Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna would be able to become part of the Polynesian grouping. So it is another way of breaking down the opposition to French nuclear tests and so on. But the divide-and-rule French policy was largely the work of former Pacific Affairs Secretary of State Gaston Flosse. With the erosion of Flosse's political power base in Tahiti



and the change of government in France, this approach has received a setback.

**PE:** Have the French been instrumental on the push for the Polynesian block?

**DR:** They initiated it in the first place. Flosse sowed the idea with the King of Tonga who welcomed it very enthusiastically and he also promoted the idea with several other Polynesian countries.

**PE:** Leaving France and getting back to the media, there are two monthly news magazines in the Pacific, Islands Business which is printed in Fiji and Pacific Islands Monthly out of Sydney, Australia. Pacific Islands Monthly was bought out by Murdoch sometime last year and has become more 'glossy'. The style has definitely changed: a more inviting style in a way, more presentable in a more slick way. What has happened with Pacific Islands Monthly (PIM) in the last half year or so; what's happened with its journalistic quality?

**DR:** Basically the editorial policy of Pacific Islands Monthly has changed quite dramatically from the moment the new editor was appointed succeeding Helen Fraser who had been acting editor for some months. Many of PIM's established writers were dumped or pushed aside and a lot more mainstream Australian journalists were taken on board. I'm thinking of people like the Danielssons [Bengt and Marie-Therese, authors of Moruroa, Mon Amour and Poisoned Reign] who had been long standing correspondents for the magazine and were recognized as the authorities on "French" Polynesian politics and nuclear colonialism as well. It seemed extraordinary that the magazine could dump such important fixtures from its publication, such well rated ones. The magazine also dropped some of its indigenous writers, not that it had many.

On the other hand the magazine has tried at times to give different perspectives. I think one example is where it was the only regional publication that was really prepared to publish anything serious about the allegations of CIA involvement in the Fiji coup. It promptly climbed down though after it experienced a lot of flack. It ran an

apology a short time after, an apology to Ratu Mara.

One of the magazine's editorial blindspots is over Fiji. It seems very reluctant to publish anything that is too critical of the regime. In fact, if anything it paints a glowing picture of what is happening in Fiji. [Editorial note: Pacific Islands Monthly announced in August that it would henceforth be published in Fiji starting with the October issue. Editorial offices have also been moved there.]

**PE:** Let's look at the other news magazine in the Pacific, Islands Business coming out of Fiji. I believe one of the co-owners was asked to leave or forced to leave Fiji. Robert Keith-Reid is now running the magazine. It has gotten thinner. There were many advertisements for tourism in Fiji fairly soon after the coup, obviously as a way to keep the magazine afloat financially because of the difficulties. But it has changed some of its writers. What has happened with Islands Business?

**DR:** Islands Business used to be, for at least five years, the leading newsmagazine in the region, not necessarily in circulation or profitability but in terms of its actual editorial content, topicality, presentations with cover stories, in-depth news and analysis reporting. Last year it moved away from that approach after the departure of co-owner and editor John Richardson. And then after the first coup the magazine took a very big backward step and really ceased to be a magazine that is carrying out thorough investigative in-depth reporting. The current editor is a journalist with a sports reporting background who used to be editor of the Fiji Sun.

The changes that have gone on in the magazine have been away from the sort of in-depth cover story, that would run up to maybe 10-12 pages, and now its very much itsy bitsy, trivial sort of stuff - the cover story in one issue was a Pacific beauty contest. Now it often reprints from other publications - like the current issue which has a reprint from a newspaper in Auckland; the cover story in the previous issue was from the Sydney Morning Herald. It should be the other way



around, and in fact it used to be the other way around. Other publications were always quoting **Islands Business**.

The magazine has now taken on a process of employing propagandists and even non-journalists reporting for them, not that there is necessarily anything wrong with engaging non-journalists, but the normal protocol in publishing is to identify who these people are. If they have an axe to grind, then clearly they are labelled where they stand so that a reader knows and therefore can make an assessment of the credibility of what he or she is reading.

**PE:** Would David Los, **Islands Business** reporter in New Caledonia, be an example of that?

**DR:** A blatant example of that. He is not a journalist. He runs the School of English in Noumea, New Caledonia and many of his students have been right-wing people in anti-independence movements. He has had close association with the National Front and also has a criminal record in New Zealand, where he was convicted for stealing \$60,000 worth of rare books from the National Library of New Zealand. After serving a prison sentence he went to New Caledonia. There are others too.

**PE:** Let's look at Fiji. You have been to Fiji, you have covered Fiji, there have been 2 coups in Fiji. Can you give a broad sense of what has happened since the first coup in Fiji and then come to this arms shipment that was found, supposedly on its way to Fiji, that has caused a bubbling explosive situation to continue in Fiji?

**DR:** Yes. Well the original objectives of the coup as portrayed by Rabuka immediately after the seizure of power - largely the reaffirmation, or reassertion, of Fijian supremacy and the abrogation of the constitution and adoption of a new constitution that would endorse and cement Fijian supremacy - has really been exposed for what it really was as time has gone on. With the second coup a Taukei government came into place which did not last very long because in fact many Taukei ministers had a genuine commitment to the sort of objectives that Rabuka **claimed** to have, in other words Fijian supremacy,

even over land issues and so on. Rabuka ended this Taukei government. He preferred to basically abdicate a situation at that time and brought in an interim government which featured all the old guard, Ratu Mara, Governor General Ganilau and so on. And by doing this, he really made it clear that this was the return of the oligarchy that had been in power since independence in 1970. It really had very little to do with indigenous rights, certainly not of the commoner Fijians. The commoner Fijians have been the great losers of what has happened in the coups.

**PE:** In what ways?

**DR:** The lifestyle, the fact that the economy has just simply nose-dived in spite of all the claims that are made by the interim government about how things are returning to normal and so on. They in fact haven't and the big sufferers are ordinary Fijians and these are the people that Dr. Bavadra was pledged to help with his government, and that became very apparent in Bavadra government policies that were introduced immediately after the election - for example, the removal of the initial charge that was made for medical health and the introducing of free bus services and so on.



photo by David Robie

## Fiji in calm times

So the disillusionment that has been setting in since the second coup is increasing all the time over the paradise that was promised as the result of the coup and the setting up of the republic. The promises haven't been achieved and the disillusionment is setting in because many Fijians realize that as time has gone on



what they thought was happening is not actually happening at all. They are now looking at what has been done in quite a different light as they understand more of what has happened.

**PE: Do you get any feeling from your visits to Fiji as to how much support amongst indigenous Fijians the Taukei movement has?**

**DR:** I would say roughly that - this is a very big generalization - that about a third of the indigenous Fijians support Dr. Bavadra and the Fiji Labour Party, and I say Fiji Labour Party rather than the Coalition. We talk about the Coalition still, but in effect the coalition is now the Fiji Labour Party because the other, the National Federation Party, has really fallen by the wayside as has indeed to a large extent the Alliance Party.

I would say about a third support the Taukei movement but the Taukei movement itself is fractured so it is quite difficult to gauge their support. Ratu Meli Vesikula's faction has even publicly swung over to Dr. Bavadra.

And then roughly about a third again would support the interim regime, Rabuka, Mara and Ganilau, basically a triumvirate. Dr. Bavadra's support is growing all the time while the support for the other indigenous groups is declining. Bavadra also has the support of more than 90% of the Indians.

**PE: What about the guns that were found in Australia earlier this year? What do you know of that situation and what do you speculate is going on?**

**DR:** On May 31 Australian customs officers uncovered a huge illegal cache of Czech-made arms - "enough to start a small war", as one official described it - bound for Fiji. Sixteen tonnes of AK-47 rifles, submachine guns, hand grenades, mortars and anti-tank mines were found in a container about to be loaded onto the Noumea-based freighter Capitaine Cook. Consignment papers described the cargo as "used machinery" shipped from the North Yemen port of Hodeidah and bound for Lautoka, Dr. Bavadra's stronghold. But the deposed Prime Minister denied any connection between the arms and the Coalition. He also reaffirmed his

commitment to a non-violent political solution.

Within a week, the Fiji military and police claimed to have seized three tonnes of weapons hidden near Ba, Lautoka and Nadi and alleged this was one-third of a shipment smuggled into the country during April. Three former Coalition ministers - including ex-Foreign Minister Khrishna Datt - were arrested and later released without charge. After 43 people were detained in raids, 22 suspects were finally charged with arms offences on what appears to be very flimsy evidence indeed.

In fact, the whole affair seems to have the hallmarks of a classic case of faking a "threat" to justify the police state. It was reminiscent of an incident in 1963 when a junk-load of Chinese weaponry was planted by the CIA off the South Vietnam coast to "prove" to journalists that North Vietnam was aiding the Vietcong. Other more recent CIA-planted arsenals have been exposed in Central America.

The Fiji arms case has centred on a London-based conman and criminal, Mohammed Rafiq "Ralph" Kahan. He fled Fiji in the mid-1970s with shareholder funds leaving a trail of fake cheques. Caught in Canada he jumped bail when he returned to Fiji. He was later arrested in the Bahamas and returned to Canada where he served a jail term. Although Australian and Fijian police claim he is a Fiji Indian, his real nationality is uncertain and he uses many aliases.

Kahan made several contacts before the arms seizure, apparently trying to set up people with Coalition sympathies and link them to the weapons. However, evidence pointed to either Taukei or dissident military involvement - or even both. Kahan himself had military contacts - in April while in Suva he had been photographed in a sergeant's uniform inside the Queen Elizabeth Barracks. In one photo he was carrying a gun and was accompanied by two soldiers.

Also, while in Fiji Kahan developed close ties with several leading Alliance politicians, including key right-wing ministers in the present regime, Apisai Tora and Taniela Veitata. The efforts to get him extradited are a sham just to make



the case appear serious. Was the original arms cache discovered in Australia really bound for Fiji at all? Or if it was, wasn't it meant to be discovered? And the weapons found in Fiji could easily have been planted by the military themselves.

The guns were used in an attempt to discredit the Coalition. At the same time the regime was able to introduce something that it had wanted to do for quite sometime - it introduced a draconian internal security decree which basically banned any kind of criticism or opposition to the Rabuka regime.

So any pretense, as there had been for quite sometime, that Fiji wasn't a police state - I think there's no doubt that it has been a police state since the first coup to a lesser or greater degree as the political situation fluctuated - but any pretense that it hadn't been was finally totally removed by this draconian decree. The military regime now has the power to hold anybody, detain anybody, for two years without charge on the basis of anything they might have said or done. It also has the power to renew the detention orders for a further period of two years indefinitely. And when you consider the state of the judiciary, if you can call it a judiciary now in Fiji, the whole situation is really quite frightening. There are hardly any really independent lawyers left in Fiji.

At the time the decree was promulgated, or gazetted, many of the independent lawyers were raided and harassed including the Secretary of the Fiji Law Society, who was held for about a week I believe. Also a foreign lawyer - a Canadian, Christopher Harland - based in New Zealand - went to Fiji to represent several of the defendants or those that had been arrested in the purge after the weapons had been found, or supposedly found. This lawyer was detained as well and statements were made to the effect that Fiji lawyers are quite good enough: "We don't need foreign lawyers to interfere in our affairs." There is no habeus corpus now. There is no chance of any independent defense and in the courts themselves, in the High Court, as I understand it, there are only two judges, and there are supposed to be nine on the Bench. So the state of Fiji human rights abuses is serious at the moment.

Also the military have a right to declare a state of emergency in a certain area, an emergency zone where they have the right to shoot people. I think it's only a matter of time. In spite of the great claims after the first coup about how this is a bloodless coup, it is really a delayed reaction type coup. In the end there will be very little to differentiate between this coup and most military coups anywhere in the world, and that it could be only a matter of time before people are indiscriminately shot.

**PE:** Not a good picture. There's a lot of speculation of possible CIA involvement in the first coup. There has been some fairly outrageous statements about CIA involvement such as ten of the ten men in the Parliament were CIA and things like this. What, to your knowledge, has been the American involvement in that first coup?

**DR:** Circumstantial evidence of CIA involvement in the first coup is strong. But more in the context of indirect help and providing a climate which enabled the coup to succeed rather than any direct initiative. I mean there were outrageous claims made immediately after the coup about how the CIA initiated the whole thing, and that sort of argument is quite absurd. Some of the specific claims are nonsense as well. Particularly the one about how the actual soldiers that went into Parliament and seized the Bavadra government were in fact black Americans and South Africans. Those sort of claims are just outrageous. But as time has gone on, there has certainly been evidence that has emerged about the links between various Americans, Australians and New Zealanders with alleged intelligence service connections in Suva and the Taukei movement and the whole process of ousting the Bavadra government. One of the major allegations had been involving Apisai Tora, one of the leaders of the Taukei Movement who is now a cabinet minister of the present regime and Bill Paupe of USAID. The Sydney Morning Herald has actually produced documentary evidence under the Freedom of Information Act which showed that money changed hands, that \$25,000 was used to build a house for Apisai Tora.

Source: Dr. David ...



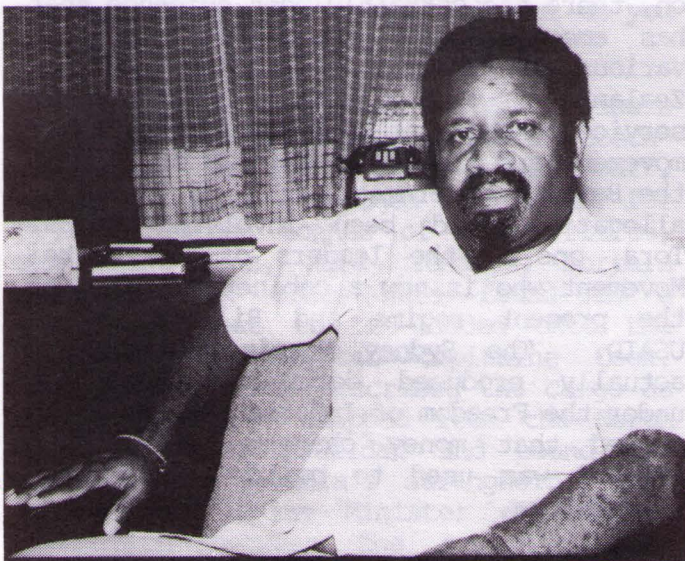
**PE:** So there are obvious links, but CIA or American influence was in no way direct or crucial to the coup?

**DR:** Yes, that's correct. More important was the role played by certain key Australian and New Zealand businessmen as exposed in Wendy Bacon's documentary "Fiji" which aired on Australian television in November 1987.

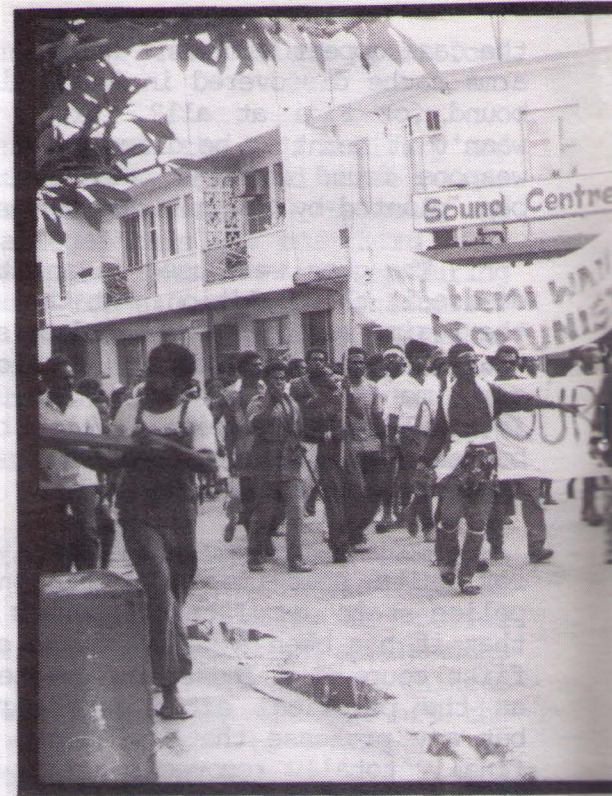
**PE:** What about the riots in Vanuatu? There were riots in Vanuatu during May. You were there. You witnessed the riots and you've written about them. It seems to be a struggle between Barak Sope, who has an economic power base around Port Vila and Father Walter Lini, the Prime Minister. Can you explain some of the deeper elements of this battle for power in Vanuatu and what you sense the situation will be in Vanuatu?

**DR:** In brief, I would say that the riots of May 16 were an attempted coup. It has to be seen in the light of what has happened in Fiji. There are interesting parallels. On the day of the riots, there were three villages that marched to Port Vila and I was with the group from Ifira. Among the many slogans that were chanted at the time was "we want a revolution like in Fiji" and this had been encouraged by some of the militants supporting Sope. In the minds of many of the militants what had happened in Fiji was an example of how power could be achieved in Vanuatu as well.

But just to go back to the issues



**WALTER LINI**



**Demonstration in Port Vila**

themselves. The Sope camp claimed that the major issue at stake was land rights and that the government had undermined its own policies and the policies of the ruling Vanuaaku Pati by clamping down on land rights. What the government did was seize the Vila Urban Land Corporation on May 10. VULCAN, as it was known, was one of two land corporations set up in 1981, the year after independence. They were set up to administer the urban land of the two largest towns, Port Vila and Luganville, on behalf of the traditional landowners of the villages. In principal the rents were supposed to go back to the villages; in practice they were being reinvested in other commercial enterprises and a housing programme. The Government believed there was corruption going on in VULCAN. There were allegations that up to ten million dollars had been filtered away.

**PE:** From VULCAN?

**DR:** Yes. And Sope was one of the VULCAN Board of Directors, representing Ifira, and a close friend of his was the General Manager. VULCAN was regarded as an important part of Sope's power base. When the Government seized the corporation it was put under police guard, and the police gave orders to the staff and the General Manager to leave the building. They



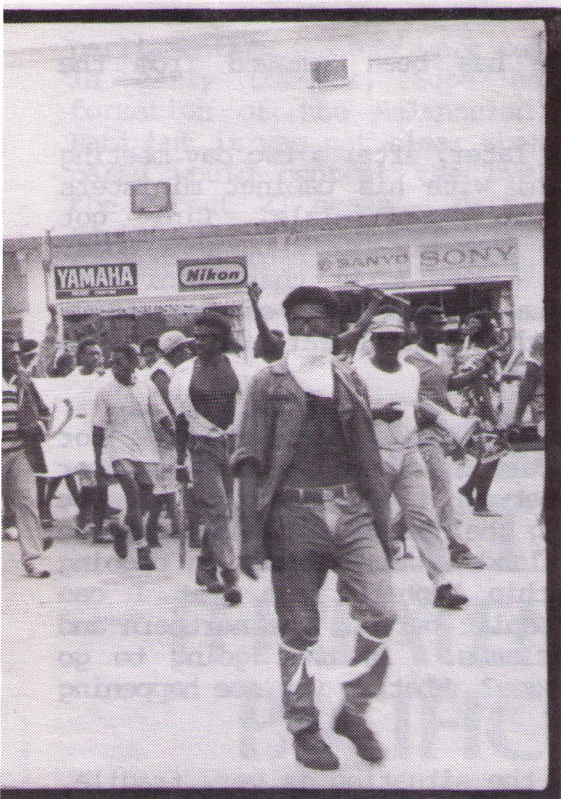


photo by David Robie

## rt Vila prior to riot

sealed the building, froze VULCAN's funds, seized the records and the Attorney General's office started investigating. This was done under the orders of the Lands Minister, William Mahit. There were claims made by Sope that this wasn't a Cabinet decision, that in effect it was a decision by the Prime Minister carried out by his Lands Minister.

The government failed really to explain satisfactorily what it was doing to the people of Vanuatu. It never made any statement on Radio Vanuatu, apart from a brief news broadcast that the office had been seized. Then Sope made a statement two days later that the Government had sold out on its land policies and that this could lead to violence. In fact, the way he expressed himself, it was generally interpreted to mean that he was threatening violence. That was four days before the demonstration took place. Over the next couple of days Sope had several meetings with the three villages - Ifira, Erakor and Pango - involved in VULCAN, and they planned the day of protest. Still the Government really didn't explain what was happening. I had an interview with the Lands Minister the day after the seizure of VULCAN and he actually indicated to me specifics about the allegations of corruption that were never said publicly.

Eventually the government did get around to saying it publicly but long after rumours had spread. So the common view in Vila was reflecting what Sope was saying. Nobody really knew what the government was doing apart from rumour. On the day of the protest when I went to see the Ifira people at the start of their march, they had all these banners which they hadn't unfurled, and trucks had been provided to bring the people to Vila to take part in the march. I talked to quite a few people and they all said this was not a political demonstration, and that it was over the land rights. But as soon the march actually started, the banners were unfurled. The banners said things like "Lini hemi wan Kommunist" [Lini is a Communist]. The people also chanted in Pidgin "Lini is a Communist" and the next moment "Lini is a Fascist"

There was no question that this was entirely an anti-Lini government demonstration. Then when the group of protesters reached the edge of Vila, they attacked a group of police. Ten police were lined up at the roadside and one of them said, "Calm down for a while and stop here." Some people smashed one of the land rover trucks and the crowd started smashing windows and property in the town, mainly Vietnamese and expatriate businesses, tourism offices and also Vietnamese buildings. This was before the riot actually began.

This is another thing the news agencies missed, no news agency reporters



photo by David Robie

# BARAK SOPE



were there so they only got little snippets of information, not the whole thing. Anyway, what happened then was that the protesters met in the middle of town where Sope was, and then they marched up with Sope to the Prime Minister's office and presented a petition to Lands Minister Mahit. The petition demanded, in effect, the capitulation of the elected government.

The protesters, about three thousand, moved around the Prime Minister's office and at that point the only real police presence was just a handful of police at the front and they couldn't really control the crowd. There were about ten soldiers from the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) behind the Prime Minister's office with gas masks and so on. After a while people dispersed and most just went home to their villages. But about 150 militants were still there and they went down to the foreshore and had a barbecue. Some broke into a couple of shops, which by then had been closed and barricaded, and stole alcohol. The militants drank for an hour or so and then the riot, the real riot, began about two o'clock in the afternoon. The rioters first attacked the government buildings just across the road, the Parliament next door, and the post office - outward international phone communications were cut until the following day. Then the VMF was called in with tear gas and they quelled the riots momentarily but they ran out of tear gas. So the battle went on for a couple of hours in the afternoon and all the tourist and airline offices, except Air Caledonie, were smashed and.....

PE: It's interesting that they left Air Caledonie, the French presence . That's quite fascinating.

DR: Sope allegedly has connections with French businesses in New Caledonia and Air Caledonie is controlled by French businesses in Noumea. It does seem strange that all the other head offices, including Air Vanuatu, were smashed in. Certainly the office was there, and Sope was said to be fingering places to be done in. Sope was taken to hospital when he got asphyxiated with tear gas. But he later claimed that he was trying to calm things down, trying to stop what was happening.

PE: And he has been removed from the government.

DR: A week later, after a two day meeting held by Lini with his cabinet ministers and his party officials, Lini got endorsement from his party to sack Sope. Then about a week after that, Lini also stripped him of the post of Secretary-General of the Vanuaaku Pati which he had held since 1974.

PE: What does this incident bode for Vanuatu? Part of it is perhaps a power struggle between two individuals, one representing the northern islands, one the southern islands. That's been an ongoing dynamic within Vanuatu from what I can gather - a split between the northern and southern islands. Is that going to go away very soon? What do you see happening in Vanuatu?

DR: I see the situation as very fragile, very fluid. But at the moment Lini and the Vanuaaku Pati are in control . But Sope is negotiating, trying hard to get support from the UMP [the opposition party] which he is in a good position to be able to do. Implications of this are that politics in Vanuatu will no longer have the strong national political groupings that they have had in the past like the Vanuaaku Pati and the UMP, with the Vanuaaku Pati perhaps the best organized political party in the South Pacific for many, many years. The tendency now in Vanuatu will be more likely along the lines of Papua New Guinea where political regional groups and alliances will take precedence over strong political groups with a national identity.

PE: Thank you, David.

[EDITOR: After this interview came the constitutional crisis. Sope and a few Members of Parliament from the Vanuaaku Pati - known in Vanuatu as the "Gang of Five" - were sacked from Parliament. Three days later opposition leader Maxime Carlot and 17 MPs from the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP) were also expelled. Accusing Prime Minister Lini of turning Vanuatu into a "dictatorship", Sope challenged the government with three legal petitions before the Supreme Court. Acting Chief Justice Gordon Ward, of the Solomon Islands, rejected all three petitions and ruled the actions of the



parliamentary speaker were constitutional. In early October, Sope announced the formation of the Melanesian Progressive Pati but it was not clear whether this new party would contest the byelections for the vacant 23 seats - half of Vanuatu's Parliament. The byelection is likely to be held sometime before the end of 1988.]

## GREENHOUSE EFFECT THREATENS PACIFIC

The capacity of island states such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and Tokelau to support their present populations will become increasingly impaired due to the "greenhouse effect", two Australian scientists have reported.

Dr. John Connell of Sydney University Geography Department and Peter Roy of the Department of Mineral Resources of New South Wales told an international geographers' conference recently that the build-up of man-made gases in the atmosphere was expected to cause a general warming of the earth's climate - the greenhouse effect - with a consequent rise in sea levels.

They predicted that sea levels would rise by 0.2 to 1.4 metres by the year 2030, and that the populations of coral atolls with land surfaces of only 2-4 metres above present low tide level would be threatened, as potable water decreased and areas for food crops were reduced.

Connell and Roy suggest that since the entire populations of the atoll states of Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and Tokelau was under 300,000 concessionary migration opportunities would eventually be offered as "aid fatigue" set in.

Reprinted from **PACIFIC REPORT** (Canberra, Australia) No. 12, Sept. 1, 1988

## Book On Fiji Coups Published

The first book covering events of the two coups in Fiji has been published by Pluto Press. *Fiji - Shattered Coups* was written in secret in Fiji during the 1987 political turmoil, and smuggled out of Fiji chapter by chapter. The book's authors are Robert Robertson, who worked in Fiji for nine years and taught at the University of the South Pacific, and Akosita Tamanisau, a Fijian journalist who worked for the Fiji Sun. The book is a well-documented study of events leading up to the coups, and the results on Fijian society.

### Other Pacific Newsletters

*Pacific Report*, out of Australia, is published every two weeks. The six page report is edited by Helen Fraser, a highly regarded journalist on Pacific affairs. For subscription info. write them at: Box 25, Monaro Cres. PO, ACT, 2603, Australia.

*Pacific Island Realities*, published in France, is the English version of *Realites du Pacifique*. It appears every two months, and is full of information on Kanaky/New Caledonia and Polynesia. For information write to: Editions de l'Echiquier, 43 rue de l'Arbre-Sec, 75001 Paris, France.

*JK Report on Micronesia*, is an "independent view of business, government and life in the FSM [Federated States of Micronesia]". It is published ten times per year. Info. from: P.O. Box 1238, Kolonia, Pohnpei, Fed. States of Micronesia 96941 (U.S. postal service).



# CONFERENCE ESTABLISHES DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Leaders from ten Pacific island countries attended the meeting of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo last week, where a new foundation - the **Pacific Island Countries Foundation (PICF)** - was set up to fund development projects in the region.

The PICF is to be largely funded by the Sasakawa Foundation of Ryoichi Sasakawa and will start with \$A30 million for projects identified by island leaders.

Sasakawa, 89, is president of the Japanese Ship Building Association, and described himself once as "the world's wealthiest fascist", and as having given away over \$US5 billion during his life.

Leaders from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Western Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia attended the meeting.

Reprinted from **PACIFIC REPORT** (Canberra, Australia) No. 12, Sept. 1, 1988

## National Television Investigates Canada's Use of Kaho'olawe Island as a Target Zone

The acclaimed television investigative show "W5" is travelling to Hawaii in October to investigate Canadian use of the archaeologically-rich island of Kaho'olawe for naval target practice. The TV team will interview the Mayor of Maui, and also go to Kaho'olawe itself. Researchers for the show say that it will be aired toward the end of November. **WATCH FOR IT!! W5 ON THE CTV NATIONAL NETWORK.**

## PACIFIC AWARDS

The Center for Pacific Island Studies, University of Hawaii, invites applications for Rockefeller Residency Fellowships (two will be awarded; \$30,000 each award). Purpose of the Fellowships is to provide support for scholarly writing and research in Pacific Islands Studies. Deadline is December 31, 1988. Info: Pacific Island Studies, 1890 East-West Road, Moore Hall 215, Honolulu, HI 96822.

### LEAVING HOME

© Jully Sipolo

Taxi horns blaring  
Screeching to a halt  
Mad scramble inside  
Get out quick!  
You'll miss your plane  
Doors fly open  
Children spilling out  
Luggage almost forgotten.

Mad rush to the counter  
Thru' Customs, Immigration  
Weigh my skinny frame  
Doesn't amount to much  
How much luggage  
Only one case  
That will be all  
Formalities over.

Only five minutes  
To say goodbye  
Eighteen sheltered years  
With Mum and Dad  
Five more minutes  
And I stand alone  
How can I thank them?  
No words can say.

Father bald, and short  
Mother, beautiful, tall and  
slim  
Straight black hair  
Tinted grey  
Work worn hands, encircle  
me  
She whispers "My child,  
Don't forget to pray."

Blaring loudspeaker  
Announced time to go  
"All passengers board  
Flight FJ704  
For Vila, Santo, Nadi, Suva"  
Handshakes all round  
Hugs, kisses, promises  
Don't forget to write.

Heart beating like a drum  
with trembling legs  
I mount the steps  
Tears run unchecked  
All shame forgotten  
Why did I apply  
For this scholarship?  
I want to stay.

One last look  
At the family  
That last look  
Should last me  
The next two years  
One last wave  
Right about turn  
Into the yawning chasm.

Engines warming up  
Earsplitting roar  
Propellers spinning  
Fasten seat belts  
No smoking please  
Race down runway  
Wheels off the ground  
Goodbye Solomons.

Jully Sipolo is a  
Solomon Islands poet.



# The Wokabout Somil

by  
**Caroline Sargent**

**THE FOREST LEGISLATION** in Papua New Guinea, perhaps inadvertently, provides for an extremely poor return to landowners. Timber is logged by usually expatriate concessionaires who pay very low royalties. Landowners (customary rights owners) can usually expect a one-off payment of about 60 Kina (£35) a hectare for timber which has taken at least 30 years to grow. On the beach, where it is sold for export, this timber fetches 3,000–5,000 Kina, and yet it is widely claimed that logging is not a profitable enterprise in Papua New Guinea, and that it is not possible to improve payments to owners. Scandals revealing transfer pricing – a system where timber is sold at an artificially low price to related overseas companies – have been meat to the nation's press for the past few years.

The legislation is supported by a very widely held political viewpoint which considers that customary rights owners should not be paid highly, as the cash will be used for beer! This is not only appalling as a gross infringement of human rights, but also contributes very strongly to the people's perception that the forest has very little value, and consequently to its degradation and loss.

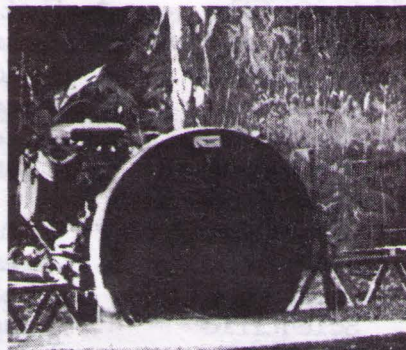
Sadly also, part of the intrinsic value of the forest has gone. Use of indigenous medicines has been linked with ancient beliefs and myths, and with changing values, much knowledge has already almost certainly been lost.

*Wokabout somil* is a Melanesian pidgin word meaning portable sawmill. The South Pacific Appropriate Technology Foundation have introduced *wokabout somils* in an attempt to develop community forestry and to ensure that more of the potential profits from the forests return to the customary owners. The *somil* is inexpensive. The cost of the machine, together with a training course, and marketing and follow-up advice, is low and in Papua New Guinea can usually be recovered by the operator within two months. It is thus ideally suited to the market for which it has been designed – village and clan groups with an adequate forest resource and a need for sawn timber for building and community projects, and for sale to supplement clan or individual income. At present there are about 200 *somils* in operation in Papua New Guinea, which could produce about 25 per cent of the annual domestic requirement for sawn timber.

The *somil* can be used in a way which causes very little damage to the forest. When a tree is felled, the *somil* is placed alongside the trunk. The timber is converted into sawn wood where it lies, after which it can simply be carried away. This means that at the *somils* designed scale of use (a seldom realised potential, of two

cubic metres a day), there is no need to build roads through the forest or to bring in heavy extraction equipment, both of which can lead to considerable soil damage and excess canopy opening. Felling individually selected trees for the *wokabout somil* may merely mimic natural gap formation which occurs when an old tree is lost from the forest.

However, the *somil* can degrade in more subtle ways. Often trees of only one or two commercially valuable species are felled, gradually leading to a less valuable stand. Alternatively trees are only felled in response to demand, leading to protracted working and canopy opening, which will encourage growth of secondary weed species.



*The wokabout somil in action.*

Although using the *somil* 'selectively' is extremely sensitive to the environment (indeed it would be hard to imagine a way in which a fully grown tree could be extracted from the forest with less damage), and the potential for sustained management is enormous, we found that at least 90 per cent of *somils* were being used for at least part of the time in association with clear felling. Timber from land being stripped of forest is converted into sawn wood and the capital raised from its sale used to plant cash crops.

There are very good reasons why this is done. Apart from the fact that, within an economy which has largely depended on subsistence agriculture, cash-cropping has the appeal of progress and the promise of financial return, the government Department of Primary Industry, through extension work and publicity, is actively promoting cocoa, copra and coffee growing.

This may not be entirely advisable in view of current world commodity markets, where cocoa has dropped 30 per cent in price since last year, and where copra and coffee prices are both unstable.

There is concern, especially within the Ministry of Forests, that although at present *wokabout somil* capacity is comparatively low, usage could become extremely widespread and could lead to unchecked and uncheckable environmental damage. Legislation exists that would enable the *somils* to be monitored, but this is not currently being applied, since resources are not available and the forest policy can, and probably should, be interpreted as

supporting the development of community-based forest industry.

At present the *wokabout somil* is being manufactured and supplied by quasi-governmental organisations associated with the South Pacific Appropriate Technology Foundation. Records are kept of where and how the *somils* are being used, and it is almost certain that these will provide an adequate safeguard. If supply of such equipment became an uncontrolled commercial venture, or if evidence accrued to indicate excessive damage, then the legislation would have to be more rigorously interpreted and a system of licensing introduced.

On the other hand, the *wokabout somil* is potentially an extremely valuable system of welfare for both the community and the forest. Over 95 per cent of the 46 million hectares of mountains, islands and alluvial coastal plains making up Papua New Guinea's land mass is owned by clan and family groups. Why, since timber conversion is clearly a profitable undertaking, do these groups give no serious consideration to the possibility of managing forests so as to provide a continuous income?

Clearly, the attitude that the forest has little commercial value because so far it has only yielded low returns, is part of the story. There is also and possibly more importantly, a lack of information. How can this be remedied? The reputation of the *wokabout somil* will spread as people begin to see that substantial profits can be made. But a more concrete and technically informed approach is also needed and for this we have proposed running a training workshop, which would involve *somil* operators, together with academics, foresters and extension workers.

IIED has recommended a very simple silvicultural system that could be used with the *wokabout somil* and which depends on rotational working of the forest: always leaving a sufficient standing crop of timber for subsequent cuts and ensuring that an appropriate diversity is maintained. A work plan is needed for each area of forest, and we have suggested that this might be offered with *somil* training – or it could become a part of the Forestry Department extension programme.

We estimate that, in suitable forest and operating over an area of 20 hectares, an income of about 2,000 kina per annum (at present prices and assuming a market) can be achieved and sustained almost indefinitely. It would take approximately 60 person days to work the 20 hectares (only a small proportion is worked each year) so the income each person day is over 30 kina. This compares very favourably with returns from coffee and cocoa, labour intensive activities which almost never pay more than five kina a person day.

A change in attitude towards the value of the forest might also mean that timber concessions become more costly to negotiate, providing an appropriate return for the owners, and in so doing, encouraging the forest to be maintained and conserved. ●



# UNPRECEDENTED TAHITIAN SEMINAR CHALLENGES FRANCE

On Hiroshima Day, August 6, the first public conference on Peace and Development was held in Papeete, Tahiti. Pulled together by an independent organizing committee representing most political parties, the Protestant and Catholic churches, trade unions, and ecological associations, the conference was actively backed and encouraged by Jacqui Drollet, the new Minister for Health, Environment and Scientific Research.

Bengt Danielsson reports that while groups organizing together is not new, the holding of a seminar rather than a protest march or rally, is. The seminar focused on the impact in various fields - such as health, economy, immigration, social life and culture - of the 25 year long presence of the French forces undertaking the nuclear tests.

Foreign specialists, including a New Zealand doctor, a Japanese cancer specialist, two members of the National Christian Council in Japan, and an Australian biologist specializing in *ciguatera* fish poisoning, were invited to participate.

## The seminar delegates called for:

- \* the creation of a health register of the 12,000 Polynesian workers who have been employed at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls since tests began in 1966;
- \* The commissioning of a World Health Organization consultant to help create an epidemiology unit in the public health service to study diseases linked to the nuclear tests;

\* that the findings of Jacques Cousteau's mission to Moruroa in October 1987 be made public (this mission's findings are thought to be the reason for France moving some testing back to Fangataufa);

\* that the French government remain responsible for any environmental and health consequences of its Pacific nuclear tests, irrespective of the future political status of French Polynesia.

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**"The time has come for us to speak our mind and not keep quiet for the money of those who send the bombs . . . I want to ask our guests, when you go back to your place . . . bring our voice to the world that there are people in French Polynesia who don't accept the tests.**

**Mr. Jacqui Drollet, Minister for Health, Environment and Scientific Research**

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**Dr. Tilman Ruff, the invited Australian biologist present, sent us the following observations:**

The Hiroshima Day Conference was clearly an event of considerable local importance. After a religious address, prayers and hymn, various speakers including the international delegation, members of the Territorial Assembly, and the Minister for Health, made brief presentations. The bulk of the day, however, was devoted to the work of four open "Commissions", which dealt with various aspects of the current situation in the country - legal and



moral issues, health and environment, social and economic issues, and political issues. Building on the basis of preparatory discussions held over the preceding two weeks, these commissions developed very specific recommendations which were presented to a final plenary session, and will be presented to the Territorial Assembly and the local government by the Minister of Health and other Assembly members.

With regard to my own particular area of expertise, ciguatera fish poisoning, I learnt much that is disturbing, and that suggested that the real picture is far worse than one can glean from published information, which appears to have been selective.

While in Tahiti I learned of outbreaks of ciguatera, probably or possibly related to military activities, which have not been documented or studied and about which there is no published information. It is clearly essential that health data collection, epidemiologic and public health services be under local Polynesian control.

**Dr. Ruff also sent along some other general impressions and comments:**

"Although it is easy to be intoxicated by the beauty of the country and the warmth and hospitality of its people, it rapidly strikes one how repressive a place Tahiti is. The repression is not overt and brutal - it is generally smooth and sophisticated - the wielding of great influence and vast amounts of money is backed by military might, using means such as extradition and imprisonment only as necessary.

Our only unpleasant encounter was with a uniformed man at the airport obviously waiting to meet us, who made us wait separately, took our passports for a time, and with an assistant meticulously searched through all my papers. Secret police

(well known to our hosts) had been present at some of our meetings.

Despite the superficial glamour and wealth that meets the tourist eye, large slums house tens of thousands of poor, many of them unemployed former CEP/CEA (military facilities) workers and their families from outer islands. There is no sewerage system in the older parts of Papeete - raw sewage goes straight into the sea. Tap water in Papeete is unsafe to drink - most people drink water imported from France.

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**"The traditional spirit of Polynesians is that the land is like our mother. People come from the land. We must respect our mother, not explode nuclear bombs in her belly. Our good way of life comes from the land. Destruction of the land will lead to the destruction of the life and way of life of Polynesian people."**

**Mr. Jacques Ihorai, President of the Evangelical Church of Polynesia**

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The level of independent information available about the nuclear tests and their effects is poor. Much basic public education remains to be done in the face of constant media barrage about the safety of the tests, the many benefits supposedly flowing from the French presence, and the hardship and chaos which would ensue should French support for the territory be withdrawn.

The "**Atkinson Report**" is relentlessly misquoted as proving that the tests are safe. There is virtually no knowledge of what the report actually does and doesn't say, its limitations, and what subsequent work has shown. [Ed. note: The Atkinson Report was released in 1983 after a visit to Moruroa by a team of New Zealand, Australian and Papua New Guinean scientists. Team members were only allowed a partial tour and given limited data. The French



government has since used their findings to show that nuclear testing at Moruroa is safe.]

The Evangelical Church of Polynesia is probably the most important organization in terms of the long-term future of the territory. It is strongly 'Tahitian' in character - all its proceedings and publications are in Tahitian (with the exception of one French and one Chinese-speaking parish), all bar one of its clergy are Tahitian, it is autonomous, it claims 60 percent of the population as its adherents, and in 1982 it made a strong public statement of its opposition to nuclear test explosions.

France exploits and maintains a colonial yoke in Polynesia to continue exploding nuclear warheads in the most unsuitable place possible - a fragile and leaky coral atoll. It is currently engaged in what is proportionally the most ambitious quantitative nuclear build-up of any of the nuclear nations. It accepts no effective nuclear non-proliferation regime and refuses to be involved in any arms control negotiations. It is prepared to engage in international terrorism against opponents of the tests.

It was a great privilege and pleasure to have been invited to Tahiti. I hope this will not have been my last visit."

- Tilman Ruff

# ROCARD VISIT TO NEW CALEDONIA PRODUCES SURPRISING SCENES

August's New Caledonia visit by French Prime Minister Michel Rocard to promote the newly signed Matignon peace accord has led to scenes unrivaled in the territory's recent history.

During the three-day visit, Kanak independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou accompanied Rocard and anti-independence leader Jacques Lafleur to a meeting of mostly settlers, and was warmly applauded along with the other two for his efforts to bring about the accord.

Under the Matignon accord the territory will have 12 months of direct rule from Paris and then nine years of federalism, in which the territory is divided into three largely autonomous provinces. Of these one is expected to be under settler control and two under Kanak control.

Three quarters of the \$A55 million that France is to spend on development in

the territory is to go to the largely under-developed Kanak provinces.

In 1998 the territory will vote on independence, and in November this year the French will vote in a national referendum that will give the whole package the guarantee that it cannot be reversed by a simple Act of Parliament if the government in Paris should change.

While in Noumea, Rocard announced sweeping measures that will attempt to redress the political, cultural and economic inequalities that exist in the territory between the Kanak and settler communities.

The state-run RFO radio and television station is to be formally reminded of its duty to "pluralism of information" by the French audio-visual authority, and will be subject to monthly scrutiny for objectivity in news reporting. Kanaks are to be recruited for



journalism and technical training and programs are to be "adapted to cultural realities."

The local judicial system is to be decentralised and accelerated training in the legal profession will be offered to suitable Kanaks.

Four thousand short-term "development traineeships" will be offered yearly by the municipalities, 400 senior and middle level public servants, mostly Kanak, are to be trained, 50 auxiliary primary teachers will be trained per year for five years, traineeships for Kanaks in private industry will be sought, and special programs will be undertaken for the recruitment and training of Kanaks in the police and the gendarmerie.

Voting in the 1998 referendum is to be restricted to those eligible to vote in 1988 and the children of voting age, but France will also monitor permanent residency of voters.

Regular reviews of the electoral rolls are to be held, a census is to be held in 1989 and campaigns will be conducted to urge Kanaks to enroll.

On the face of it, the FLNKS did not succeed with their principal demands in the Matignon talks, except for the amnesty that was secured for around 200 Kanak militants (although 30 charged with murder must stand trial). That was crucial for the FLNKS as recognition of their militants' efforts in bringing about the new plan.

Their other key demands were for electoral reform, redrawing of the boundaries of the three provinces that are to be set up under the ten-year accord, and a shorter period before the vote on self-determination.

But the FLNKS went to Paris armed with a series of supplementary measures they were prepared to trade on. Leaders in Noumea say 90 percent of these demands were met, but that the exact details will be released slowly.

They include measures such as:

- controlling immigration

- shifting the capital from Noumea to the northern province,
- the gradual transfer out of the country of the 4000-plus metropolitan French public servants,
- reduction in the enormous pensions currently paid to metropolitan French retired in the territory
- foreign investment possibilities for the provinces,
- adaptation of business laws to Kanak needs (such as cooperatives in tribal villages and joint ventures between provincial governments and Kanak collectives),
- amending the currently liberal tax laws,
- easing the criteria for bank loans to help Kanaks and
- the adaptation of the education system to Kanak needs.

"Perhaps instead of getting to our goal through the big ideological front door, we can get there with a series of small steps round the back path", one FLNKS leader told **PACIFIC REPORT**.

Reprinted from **PACIFIC REPORT** (Canberra, Australia), No. 12, Sept. 1, 1988 .

## FRANCE STEPS UP TRADE EFFORT

The trade mission at the French Embassy in Suva has begun feasibility studies on large-scale French consortiums setting up in Fiji. A spokesman said that Fiji could become the focal point of future French investment in the Pacific.

Reprinted from **PACIFIC REPORT** (Canberra, Australia) No. 12, Sept. 1, 1988



# CUSO IN THE PACIFIC

Few Canadians know much about Melanesia, but a greater proportion of Melanesians know of Canada. That's because they have come to know the thousand or so Canadians who have worked there since CUSO, an international development organization, opened a program in the South Pacific in the late 1960s. The CUSO workers have included fishermen, foresters, agriculturalists and horticulturists, doctors, nurses, dentists, teachers, engineers, tradespeople, town-planners, librarians, craftspeople and community developers.

Melanesia is the largest of the three island groupings in the South Pacific. The other two are Micronesia and Polynesia. Melanesia not only has the largest land mass and population but also, being volcanic in origin rather than coral-based, is endowed with mineral resources and is more fertile.

When CUSO's South Pacific program first opened, Canadians were placed in Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, Kiribati and the Cook Islands. The program became more focused in 1971 when 10 cooperants were posted to Papua New Guinea (PNG). By 1979, CUSO programming was concentrated in PNG with more than 160 Canadians there, almost half of them teachers. By that time, the Pacific had become CUSO's second largest worldwide program.

Today, the Pacific remains one of the organization's larger programs, with 100 cooperants in the region at any one time. Seventy-five percent of them are in PNG, with the remainder in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

When Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975, the government's main goals were expansion of primary education and maintenance and expansion of the communications and transportation networks. The focus today is on the rural areas in an effort to slow urban drift. Support is being given to village-owned production and marketing enterprises, youth training, rural health care, and indigenous women's organizations.

Further east in the south Pacific, in Vanuatu, a 900-km chain of 80 islands, CUSO has been operating a program for seven years. Soon after the country (formerly the New Hebrides) gained independence from joint French/British rule, the first CUSO workers were assigned to fisheries development. Thanks to the efforts of 20 fishermen from Canada's east and west coasts, this small nation has a thriving village-based fishing industry which is creating jobs in the rural areas and improving nutrition. In addition to fishermen, CUSO has doctors, a teacher, a furniture factory advisor and lands officers among the 233 Canadians in Vanuatu.



photo by Barbara McCann

## CUSO WORKER MARIA COADY WEIGHS A BABY DURING A CLINIC VISIT IN PNG

CUSO's newest Pacific program is in the Solomon Islands. Program possibilities were investigated two years ago and, as a result, development efforts are being directed at women's interests and rural community development. The several CUSO workers there include a project advisor with the National Council of Women (a non-government umbrella organization for rural women's groups), a popular theatre animateur, community development workers, and a physiotherapist.

Apart from these "country" programs, CUSO is also involved in wider concerns resulting from the region's common culture and shared history. The small island countries and communities are very



vulnerable, both economically and politically, to super-power interests in the region.

Says Raymond Clark, CUSO's Pacific regional coordinator based in Papua New Guinea: "There is a need to share experience and resources to protect Pacific islanders' long-term interests. World War II, for example, had a profound impact on the whole region. Island groups were divided among the major powers who continue today to compete for economic resources and for strategic influence in the region."

Nuclear testing by colonial powers and the dumping of nuclear wastes by other Pacific rim countries have also profoundly affected Pacific islanders. The Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement, a

regional organization, is giving voice to concerns about this. Another regional organization the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organizations, sponsors liaison units being set up by several countries to strengthen local NGO programming and networking. CUSO supports both these organizations.

CUSO recruits in Canada on a continuing basis for Pacific placements and also raises funds from the Canadian public for community projects in the region. If you are interested in a posting or more information about the organization, contact your nearest CUSO office (there are 18 across the country) or write to CUSO, 135 Rideau Street, Ottawa, Ontario, CANADA K1N 9K7

# TONGA OPENS GATES

By Phil Twyford

**BLOWING** through Nuku'alofa, where pigs graze under frangipani trees and videos can be hired on every street corner, is a breeze of change.

This hot, dusty town of 30,000 souls is the capital of Tonga, home of the royal family and a magnet for islanders seeking jobs and education for their kids. It is also Tonga's gateway to the world and a springboard to other little Tongas in Auckland, Sydney and the US.

Links with New Zealand are intimate. Most Tongans have lived and worked or at least have family there. When a local politely asks Kiwi tourists where they are from, often as not he or she means what suburb or street.

Those Tongans who have swapped their island home for a factory job and a house in the suburbs of a foreign city now provide their country's main source of income in the form of remittances. Tonga's biggest export is bodies.

But the place they left behind is undergoing changes - some of them painful.

The Pacific's only surviving monarchy and a bastion of traditional Polynesian values, Tonga has opened its gates to the world, and the world has come in.

Tongans have long boasted their nation was never colonised by a foreign power but today it is completely dependent

on overseas aid. Port facilities and a fleet of Mercedes for the Prime Minister's Department are the gifts from benevolent governments, while the only development outside the main town is weatherboard and louvre houses built with money earned overseas.

**IN** what used to be a nation of peasant farmers, lower commodity prices and dreams of making it in the city have emptied the plantations and crowded the streets of Nuku'alofa. Young men with time on their hands play pool and hang out. In a factory in Nuku'alofa's small industries zone, young women who would have once spent their days beating and painting tapa cloth now machine-knit New Zealand wool sweaters for re-export back to Auckland shops.

The courtship ritual of "Faikava," where the suitor and his friends visit the girl's home to sit around, drink kava and sing, has been all but bypassed by teenagers who now meet at dance halls.

Land, generator of wealth and basis of the nobles' power, used to be guaranteed to every male over 18 years in the form of an 3.25 ha block. Now spare land is virtually unavailable - one reason so many Tongans migrate.

In the late 20th century Tonga is governed by a feudal monarchy, but some



commoners are now openly challenging the privileged rule of a land-owning nobility.

Tonga is the cradle of ancient Polynesia. It has been settled since 500 years before Christ and ruled by a succession of kings called the Tui Tonga. Travelling on great double-hulled canoes, Tongans ruled an empire that stretched to include Samoa, Niue, Futuna, Tokelau and parts of Fiji at its zenith seven centuries ago.

The present King Taufa'ahau Tupou is descended from one of three dynasties which fought bloody civil wars towards the end of the 18th century. Having established military supremacy, and with the aid of Methodist missionary Shirley Baker who is said to have drafted the constitution, King George Tupou abolished slavery, and introduced government and written law. He conferred noble status on 33 chiefs and centralised power in his government.

**NOBLE** Fusitu'a, chief of the remote island of Nui'afu'ou and an MP until recently when he stood down to make way for Crown Prince Tupouto'a's entry into politics, is a descendant of one of the original aristocrats.

Like others of their class, Fusitu'a and his wife Eseta were both educated overseas where they have lived much of their lives. With a son at Auckland's Kings College and another at university in Canberra, back in Nuku'alofa they live a life not unlike that led in the more comfortable suburbs of Auckland.

A member of the World Anti-Communist League and considered by many to have been a diehard royalist - he says as a noble his role is to protect the monarchy and uphold the status quo - Fusitu'a is fast gaining a reputation as a liberal.

He supported the unprecedented action of a commoner MP who recently sued the government successfully for unfair dismissal and denial of free speech, and talks of corruption in government that would rock the whole Pacific if it saw the light of day.

As a noble he is the father figure to the people who live on his estate, expected to arbitrate in disputes and help in times of need. At times like the King's forthcoming birthday celebrations it is his responsibility to arrange 'bold' or tribute in the form of pigs, yams and other food to be presented from the estate.

His father lived the old traditions of service. In 1946, when as a young man Fusitu'a was one of a handful of Tongans in Auckland, his home island of Nui'afu'ou was devastated by a volcanic eruption. His father supervised the evacuation of the villages to vacant land on the island of Eua where they settled in grim conditions on virgin land and began from scratch with no houses, no crops, power or running water.

Only nine of Tonga's 28-member legislature are elected. The rest, like the prime minister and Cabinet are appointed by the Crown, but Fusitu'a is unimpressed by those wanting a Western-style democracy.

"There would be chaos. I am not saying it will never happen . . . but can the mob front up with something better?"

While the power of the land-based nobility is said to be on the wane, a new class of entrepreneurs is on the rise in Nuku'alofa. Perhaps half are Europeans, many of whom have married Tongan women and put down roots.

Once the sleepy administrative heart of a subsistence economy, Nuku'alofa is now a thriving commercial centre. Locals grumble sometimes you cannot find a place to park just where you want it.

Lipoi Tupou, recently retired chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and the only native merchant to compete with big stores like Burns Philp and Morris Hedstrom, remembers when there was no bank in Tonga.

When he threw in his job as a customs official and entered business 25 years ago there were 42 small retail stores on the main island of Tongatapu. Now there are 600.

"Then people grew food for themselves and gave the rest away. Now they are thinking of exporting and setting up business. Things have changed: now people want good houses and nice food. They understand money is a good thing to have."

A more recent generation of capitalist finds the competition just as tough. Will Ilolahia, Auckland-born and former manager of the band Herbs, returned to find his roots in 1983 and set up a shop on the main street selling screen-printed T-shirts and rock cassettes.

Before long he had two imitators selling similar lines upstairs in the same building. There are now eight others on the same road.



And being in business implies certain obligations. "Family tax" is the term Ilolahia uses to refer to the frequent contributions he is expected to make to funerals and other family occasions.

The video boom is another aspect of Tonga's new consumer society. Nine years after videos first appeared here, perhaps one in six homes in suburban Nuku'alofa have New York in their livingrooms.

The term "kailuva," literally one who eats the louvre window, used to refer to peeping toms. Now it is slang for the small boys who line up open-mouthed against louvres watching other people's videos.

Nuku'alofa now has nearly 30 video hire outlets which do a vigorous trade. Blue movies are good business, too, in this devoutly Methodist country which on the surface has a strict Victorian morality.

Unlike the state radio and newspaper, videos are almost impossible to censor. Like the video machines, tapes are sent by relatives overseas or brought by those returning.

Tonga has television now, too. The local station broadcasts five-days old tapes from a station in Washington, DC, complete with old news bulletins and customers pay a subscription for a descrambler. In certain weather, non-paying customers can just about do without the descrambler.

Ilolahia says the popularity of videos has broken down at least one tapu. The "faka'apa'apa" or respect between brother and sister would never have allowed them to sit in the same room and watch a sex scene on the small screen. Such conventions are falling out of fashion.

**LOCAL** police officers confirm a suspicion that videos have contributed to Tonga's crime rate. Ilolahia is sure the recent burglary of a bakery in which an entire safe was carried off was inspired by video.

Out along Nuku'alofa's waterfront, past the hotels and palatial houses of diplomats and Government ministers, is the town's newest suburb - a shanty town built on a swamp.

The 200 or so families were moved there by the Government in 1983 from a similarly destitute and hostile site

across town after it was devastated by Cyclone Isaac.

Most came to Nuku'alofa from the outer islands looking for opportunities.

Clean water is scarce and any ground not under water is like a quagmire. Resigned to the fact that no better land is available, the city's "new poor" are beginning to build homes and gardens using waste coconut husks to fill in the swamp. A Catholic nun, Sister Tuifua, does the rounds encouraging them to build better houses and often arranges materials and labour through church aid agencies.

Growing inequalities in Tonga are here to stay at least according to economist and university lecturer Havea Katoa and a senior manager at the Bank of Tonga, Afu'alo Matoto. The gap between the haves and have-nots has grown steadily since the 1960s when the government launched a strategy to develop beyond the subsistence economy. Expectations were fueled by regular injections of overseas aid as the government aimed to develop industry and diversify export crops.

**THERE** have been successes. Tongans talk of vanilla grown in the northern islands of Vava'u in tones the New Zealanders used to reserve for kiwifruit. Crops have been diversified but producers still struggle to build up production against natural disasters, low export prices, land shortage and hiccups like the fruit fly controversy which has halted watermelon exports to New Zealand.

A sophisticated dessicated coconut factory supplied by Australian aid lies idle for lack of coconuts. A government replanting programme failed to regenerate the islands' deteriorating coconut palms and low prices for copra discourage harvesting. A local mill producing coconut oil for domestic use imports nuts from Kiribati.

Perhaps the biggest problem is finding jobs for a burgeoning population. Havea Katoa says "Migration overseas is definitely a safety valve. More and more people want to go overseas because there are no opportunities here."

Reprinted from THE AUCKLAND STAR (New Zealand), 1988.



# SOME SPPF RESOURCES

## VIDEOS FOR RENT (to donor/members only)

**TAHITI WITNESS** - a 1 hour documentary by a joint team from British and New Zealand television dealing with nuclear testing and its effects on the Maohi people of French Polynesia (1/2" VHS, NTSC format)

**NEW CALEDONIA REFERENDUM**- a one hour documentary from Four Corners of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation presenting a two subject interview: Kanak and Caldoche (non-Kanak New Caledonian) after the September 1987 "independence" referendum in Kanaky/New Caledonia (1/2" VHS, NTSC format)

**LAMOTREK: HERITAGE OF AN ISLAND** - This 30 minute documentary about the Micronesian island of Lamotrek explores the relationship between traditional island skills and the spirit world of Lamotrekian mythology. A gently paced anthropological view of a still remote Pacific island (1/2" VHS, NTSC format, 1988)

**TUNA SANDWICH** - a pointed and sometimes humorous account of the conflicts between the Pacific island nations and the American Tuna Boat Association over fishing agreements, or lack of them, in the South Pacific (1 hour, 1/2" VHS, NTSC format)

**FIJI: SECRET SERVICE AND THE COUPS** (Dateline. SBS Television, Australia) - Four Corners aired in November 1987 this exploration of some of the unanswered questions concerning the 1987 coups in Fiji. (1 hour, 1/2" VHS, NTSC format)

**TROUBLE IN PARADISE** - a review of the conflicts between the United States and Palau surrounding Palau's nuclear free clause in its constitution. Presented by Frontline of PBS Television/U.S. in May 1988. (1 hour, 1/2" VHS, NTSC format)

Note: All videos can only be rented out to SPPF donor/members in North America. Charge is \$15 plus postage.

## BOOKS FOR SALE (prices include postage)

**EYES OF FIRE:** By New Zealand journalist David Robie (see interview in this issue). The book tells the fascinating story of the last voyage of the 'Rainbow Warrior', the Greenpeace ship that was sunk by French government secret service agents in Auckland harbour in July 1985. This book is the only one to cover the Warrior's evacuation of the people of Rongelap from their irradiated atoll. Full of photographs. 1986. 168 pp. \$15

**PALAU: A CHALLENGE TO THE RULE OF LAW IN MICRONESIA** is a report of a mission on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists and the American Association for the International Commission of Jurists. 1988. 58 pp. \$4

**PACIFIC WOMEN SPEAK: WHY HAVEN'T YOU KNOWN?** From Green Line Press, this 40 page booklet, edited by Women Working for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific of England, presents interviews of Pacific island women speaking on the effects of nuclear testing and colonialism on their peoples. 1987. 40 pp. \$5

**THE ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC** An excellent review of the anti-nuclear movement in the Pacific complete with a list of books to review. Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. 18. No. 2. 1986. \$7.00

**COLLISION COURSE AT KWAJALEIN: MARSHALL ISLANDERS IN THE SHADOW OF THE BOMB.** Authored by Giff Johnson, editor of the Marshall Islands Journal, this 71 page booklet is an informative account of the history of U.S. nuclear and military involvement and its effects on the Marshallese people; deals in particular with Kwajalein Atoll, now the site of Star Wars testing programs. 1984. \$10

If you wish to purchase any of these, contact SPPF at 409-620 View Street, Victoria, B.C., CANADA V8W 1J6 (604/381-4131). We also have available a **Resource List**. If you would like one, drop us a note.



# READERS' COMMENTS

"I'm happy to make my contribution to your publication. It always amazes me how different these stories are from what we get in the media."-S.B./Courtenay, B.C.

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"I was delighted to hear from you and to receive copies of your newsletters and fact sheets. You have been able to develop some excellent resource materials on the Pacific, and I want to congratulate you on what you are producing.

This year, for the first time, I visited Micronesia. I could naturally write pages about all that. One thing that really struck me was how different Micronesia is in many ways from the countries here in the south, mainly because of their extreme dependency on the US. In a lot of ways it reminded me of Tahiti - local cultures threatened with extinction because of extreme foreign influence, inflated wage and project scales bearing no relationship to local resources, etc. In the end, people end up with no real choice when it comes to sticking with the US or going for independence. And the other striking thing of course is the extreme militarisation of the region. One very significant aspect of this is the big drive to recruit Micronesians into the US military." - a reader in the Pacific.

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"**TOK BLONG** is always interesting, stimulating, devoted...I read with great interest and sympathy every issue. As a "French dissenter", as someone who totally disagrees with the arrogant, militaristic and repressive policies conducted by "France" throughout the Pacific - and not only in our so-called overseas "territories", I fully support your work.

The recent events in Ouvea are just one more name of shame and disgrace, added to a long list: Moruroa, Marsden Wharf in Auckland, Vila, Santo and Tanna in 1980, etc. It is appalling, unbearable, that more than thirty years after the Algerian War, the French military still consider it proper, to torture and kill people at will, "in the name of France and under the French flag". - Jean Chesneaux, Paris

"I immensely enjoy Tok Blong SPPF! It's very informative. You might be interested to know that the environmental situation in the Marshalls and the Federated States of Micronesia remains disastrous and there is so much destruction of coral in the Marshalls." - W.S./Michigan, USA

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"We find your publication useful, informative, and would very much like to continue receiving it. Thanks for the renewal reminder, and keep up the good work." - K.E./University of B.C.

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"C'est un plaisir de renouveler mon abonnement, merci de me le rappeler. Bon travail." - J.V./Sherbrooke, Quebec

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"Enclosed is my annual contribution to SPPF, for a bit more than before because you did not dun me repeatedly for not paying earlier. Your letter of 16 February/88 about renewal awaited my return from a round-the-world trip. It will take me some time to catch up with back issues of Tok Blong SPPF, especially as I now subscribe to similar papers (none surpassing Tok Blong!) from both Australia and New Zealand. - R.S./Arizona

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"Your efforts are some of the more important and we intend to maintain our support both as individuals and as an organization (WFC). Keep it up,our cheque for \$30 should help."-D.S./Victoria, B.C.

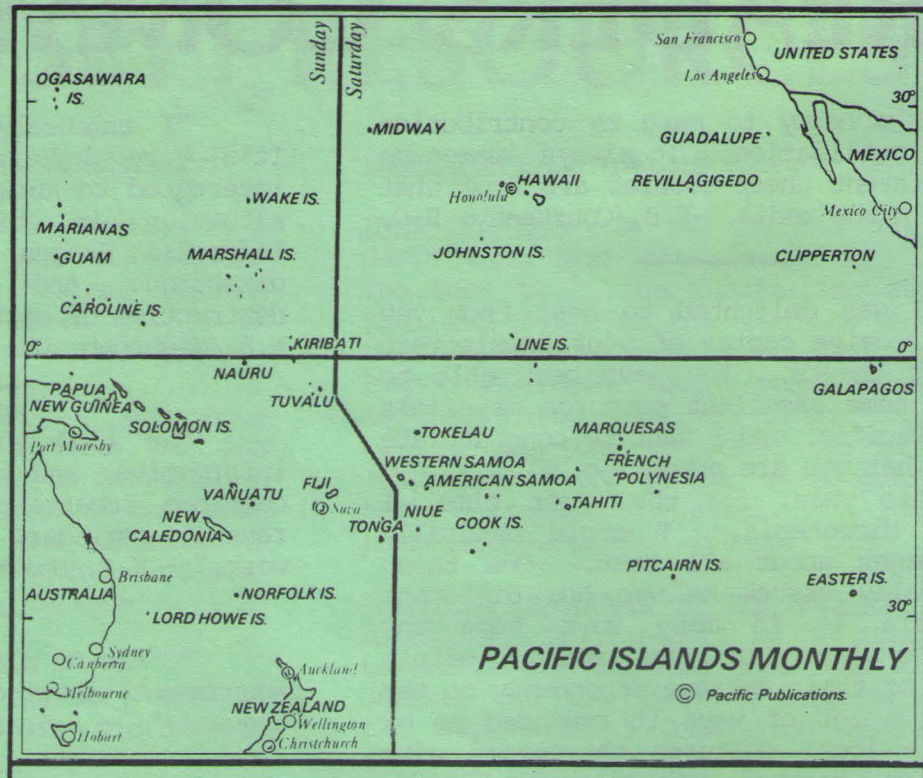
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"I would like to renew my membership with the SPPF for the coming year. I am pleased and thankful to be able to support your efforts in a small way and hope that you have every success with future projects. I can't really think of any suggestions I'd like to make regarding Tok Blong SPPF - it has always seemed to me to be exceptionally well done." -A.K., London, Ontario

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Here's our renewal. It's a great newsletter/magazine. We get lots from it. Thanks - Denman Island Peace Group





USED WITH PERMISSION

*Tok Blong SPPF* goes to readers in the following places:

- |                  |               |                                |
|------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Canada           | Fiji          | Western Samoa                  |
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| Australia        | Scotland      | Vanuatu                        |
| New Zealand      | England       | Denmark                        |
| Netherlands      | Bangladesh    | Federated States of Micronesia |
| Solomon Islands  | Cook Islands  | Kiribati                       |
| Philippines      | Thailand      | Kingdom of Tonga               |
| Sweden           | West Germany  | Malaysia                       |
| French Polynesia | New Caledonia | Japan                          |
| Switzerland      | India         | Niue                           |
| Pitcairn Island  | Sudan         | Northern Mariana Islands       |
| Nauru            | Palau/Belau   | The Marshall Islands           |
| Guam             | South Korea   | Hawaii                         |

Know someone who would be interested in *Tok Blong SPPF*? Send us his/her name, address and interest in the Pacific Islands (if known) and we will send a complimentary copy. Let us know if we can use your name as a reference. Send to SPPF, 409-620 View St., Victoria, B.C., CANADA V8W 1J6.