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TONGA

The last decade has seen an escalation of social, political, and economic changes in Tonga, but the events of the past year have been extraordinary: Thousands of people participated in numerous protest marches, climaxing in a general strike that held the government hostage for six weeks; royal family insiders spoke publicly against the authority of the king; the first elected and commoner member of Parliament was named prime minister; the first woman was appointed to cabinet; and the king gave his assent to the National Committee for Political Reform. It has been a dramatic, traumatic, and emancipatory year for Tonga, and in these respects the consequences of the popular uprisings of 2005–2006 constitute a political, social, and psychological coup for Tongans at home and abroad.

In March 2005, whistle-blower revelations about Shoreline, the company holding a monopoly on power

generation, provided the impetus for the first major march of what became a season of marches. Piveni Piukala, a former computer systems manager at Shoreline, alleged financial mismanagement, falsification of audits, and exorbitant salaries of approximately US\$400,000 each for the three main executives, Sosefo Ramanlal, Soane Ramanlal, and Crown Prince Tupou-to'a. Piukala warned that the problems at Shoreline would cause the people to feel disloyal toward the royal family and especially toward the crown prince. In early May, the People's Representatives filed writs in the Supreme Court against Shoreline and the Tonga Electric Power Board. At the same time, the Tongan Human Rights and Democracy Movement (THRDM) began organizing a petition and conferring with the People's Democracy Party and other "Demos"—democracy movement supporters—about a protest. The petition listed objections to the way the national electricity provision had been privatized, to the fact that Shoreline held a monopoly, and to the fact that electricity was so expensive while the company's directors received such high salaries. After gaining twenty thousand signatures, on 26 May 2005 a record four thousand people marched to present the petition to the palace. It was read aloud by the THRDM president, the Rev Simote Veā. As he spoke, Veā also called on the king to surrender power to the people and to become a ceremonial figurehead like the monarch in Britain. (The People's Representatives later disavowed prior knowledge of these latter demands.)

The next day, parliamentarians

considered the forthcoming budget and appropriations for salary revisions, which had been going through committees including the Higher Salary Review Committee. Amid the debate, 'Akilisi Pohiva, the First People's Representative for Tongatapu, was steadfast in moving for a delay on the salary revisions vote. His motions were defeated, and on 1 July the new salary scales came into effect. Upper-echelon civil servants were awarded raises of up to 57 percent, while some of those in the bottom tiers received nothing.

The public servants' strike was the defining event of 2005. It began, unofficially, early in July. Soon after the salary revisions were released, deputy ministers and other mid-level administrators from various sections of the public service began clandestinely discussing the recently released revised salary scales. Their cautious discussions with each other stemmed from the unusual way in which salaries and departmental budgets had been released: Previously, the civil roll was an open document, and civil employees were able to compare budgets and remuneration. But in 2005, this transparency was foregone; administrators were told that they only needed to know the information for their own sections. However, as one deputy department head told me, "The cabinet's attempt at secrecy was defeated in the Tongan way: Of course, we all have family in other parts of the civil service. After some phone calls, we knew the whole budget! That's when we knew that the pay rises were unfair."

A meeting of a thousand civil servants on 13 July led to the formaliza-

tion of the Public Service Association (PSA), with Finau Tutone as president and Maliu Takai as vice president. At the meeting there were calls for a national strike and another protest march, but the newly formed PSA executive managed to convince the members to begin with a letter of grievance. This was submitted to Paula Ma'u, the deputy secretary to the prime minister, on 15 July, with a response requested within three days. The prime minister was out of the country, but on 20 July, with no response from the prime minister's office, Clive Edwards (former minister of police but now one of Tongatapu's People's Representatives) gave an interview on television. He spoke of the inequity of the new salary structures. As Edwards put it, while government ministers now earned over T\$100,000 (US\$52,532) a year, policemen struggled to survive on T\$50 (US\$26.27) a week. The People's Representatives, he affirmed, would support a strike if the Public Service Association called for one. The following evening, 21 July, two thousand civil servants met at the Queen Sālote Hall in the capital of Nuku'alofa and voted for an immediate strike.

At the time of the Shoreline protest, a march of four thousand people seemed a huge turnout. But it proved to be a mere rehearsal for the protests to come. Despite pleas by the PSA executive to give the prime minister's office more time, and buoyed by the momentum of the turnout for the Shoreline protest, the civil servants had had enough. Overnight they mobilized, and on 22 July an estimated six thousand people marched through Nuku'alofa to Parliament.

These numbers reflect roughly 8 percent of the residents of the main island of Tongatapu, and 6 percent of the national population. The turnout for the march and the rapidity with which the civil action was mobilized astonished even the organizers. Their demand was simple: change the salary scales.

The first response came from Acting Prime Minister Cecil Cocker. He advised the striking workers that the cabinet could not accommodate them; they had to follow procedure and seek a resolution to their salary disputes from their heads of departments and the Public Service Commission. He also warned that if people did not return to work, they would be dealt with under the public service regulations—a clear threat. The next day, 23 July, downtown Nuku'alofa was like a ghost town. Strikers had not returned to their desks. The offices of the Ministries of Marine and Ports, Fisheries, Lands, Labor, Works, the Post Office, the Civil Service Commission, and the Treasury were essentially closed. A lack of ports personnel required one ship to bypass its scheduled stop in Tonga. But the government remained steadfast: there would be no changes to the salary scales.

Undaunted, the Public Service Association held a rally on 25 July, again at Queen Sālote Hall, where they voted to ask Parliament to support their cause. Following the rally, some two thousand people marched to Pangai Si'i, a park located in central Nuku'alofa between Parliament, Treasury, and the Prime Minister's Offices. They declared their intention to wait there for the government's

response to their request. The following morning, Finau Tutone issued a call for the civil servants to begin meeting at Pangai Si'i until they received the government's response. Public schools throughout the country were forced to close, as 1,466 (out of 1,600) teachers walked off the job. The PSA letter proposed increases of 80 percent to salaries for the lowest-level employees, 70 percent for those at the mid-level, and 60 percent for those in the upper ranks. They estimated the raises would cost T\$20 million (US\$10,506,409) and could be covered without increasing taxes. This has come to be referred to as the "60, 70, 80 Letter."

In Parliament, the Tu'ipelehake, nephew of the king and a Nobles' Representative, made a motion in support of the PSA letter. With cabinet members abstaining, Nobles' and People's Representatives voted to refer the letter to the cabinet. Meanwhile, a labor negotiator and a retired judge arrived from New Zealand, at the request of the Tongan government, to act as mediators. Acting Prime Minister Cecil Cocker demanded that the strikers return to work while the negotiations took place. The Public Service Association responded that they would, if granted an immediate 60 percent pay increase. When government refused, the association refused to meet with the mediators. When they returned to New Zealand, the labor negotiator called on the trade unions there to support the Tongan strikers.

By 28 July, with imports and exports stymied, the business community became involved. Sione Kioa, president of the Tonga Chamber of

Commerce, brokered a deal between the PSA executive and most government ministers that seemed to provide a means for people to return to work while negotiations continued. The deal called for a return to the old salary structure (the one that had been in place prior to 1 July 2005), but with an increase of 10–15 percent for all civil servants below heads of departments and ministers, and an agreement to plan for further pay increases as they could be afforded. The deal also called for reforming the membership of the Higher Salary Review Committee so that it included actual civil servants. The final point was to suspend and defer the implementation of the salary system that had been devised by the Higher Salary Review Committee. All that was required for civil servants to return to work was some sort of official confirmation from the prime minister, who had recently returned from overseas. The prime minister, Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka ‘Ata, thanked the businesspeople for their interest but advised them that government would follow its own process.

The prime minister’s rejection of the deal was perceived by many civil servants as a strong-arm tactic, rumored to be on the advice of the crown prince. They saw it as intended to break their solidarity and play on their poverty. Whether these motives were true or not, the strikers began to show increased resolve: Pangai Si’i became the daily staging ground for the striking workers to hear speeches, sing songs, and drink kava. This attracted supporters beyond those working in the civil service, as well as those working in essential branches,

such as health and police, or those who could not afford to go on strike.

On 29 July, the cabinet offered a unilateral raise of 12.5 percent, funded mostly by cabinet ministers agreeing to relinquish the raises allocated to them by the Higher Salary Review Committee. The cabinet argued that this was all the country could afford. The minister of finance, Siosiu ‘Utoikamanu, said that the PSA proposal would cost T\$36.8 million, and would require raising more taxes, contrary to what the Public Service Association had determined. Later, the finance minister admitted to an error in his estimation. His error was a source of both amusement and derision within the ranks of the striking civil servants. As one striker told me: “I used to look up to them, they were the ministers, but now, I saw, they don’t know what they are doing! I am the one with the degree in economics, we are the ones who have the education, and they make decisions but they even don’t know how. They are incompetent and we cannot let them ruin Tonga any more.” The 12.5 percent offer was rejected and was later followed with other cabinet proposals—20 percent, then 30 percent—but the strikers’ resolve was solid. “We know the money is there,” many people said, in response to the argument that pay raises over 30 percent would bankrupt the country.

By now, the gatherings at Pangai Si’i were larger and more elaborate. Marquees, tables, and benches were set up, and a portable loudspeaker system allowed the growing crowds to hear and voice their opinions. Food was donated by local businesses, and a local television station aired live

broadcasts of the speeches. Sympathy for the striking workers was expanding across the country and overseas. The interest of foreign media organizations was acknowledged with protest signs written in English.

On 3 August, the head prefect of Tonga College led one hundred singing and clapping students to Pangai Si'i, where they declared their support for their teachers and expressed concern for their education. In response, the minister of education, the Reverend Dr Tevita Palefau, announced a salary offer for teachers amounting to T\$2 million, with raises ranging from 60 percent to 125 percent. Two days later, on 5 August, in the largest political gathering in Tongan history, teachers and other striking workers met at the Teufaiva Stadium to discuss the offer. They voted resoundingly to reject the offer, seeing it as "too late" and as a blatant attempt to split PSA solidarity. The Tu'ipelehake spoke in support of the strikers' goals and acquired the nickname, "the People's Prince." The cheering and clapping crowd of ten thousand, with the Tu'ipelehake among them, then marched from the stadium to Parliament to deliver their unified response: the only acceptable offer was "60, 70, 80, for all public servants."

5 August was a busy day in Nuku'alofa. While actively supporting the strikers in their off-hours, most physicians, dentists, nurses had remained on the job. But this day, some six hundred health professionals, led by Drs 'Aivi Puloka and 'Ana 'Akau'ola, marched to Pangai Si'i, leaving behind a skeleton crew to handle obstetric and emergency cases at Vaiola Hospital. Striking health workers were

joined by students and parents from the Nuku'alofa Primary School, the Catholic Women's League, and the Tonga Institute of Higher Education. The civil servants' strike was becoming a general strike.

Soon thereafter, the cabinet issued an order to close Pangai Si'i. This led to the first confrontation between strikers and police. Early in the morning on Monday, 8 August, police cordoned off the park entrances. When the initial group of strikers arrived they were told to go home. Instead, a crowd gathered at the perimeter of the park. The mood was defiant. The potentially volatile situation was diffused when the Reverend 'Aisea Kava began to pray: as the police officers joined in the prayer, the crowd of about two hundred spontaneously surged into the park with cries of "Don't fear!" One woman described it to me afterward as "a wonderful moment. It was like God was there with us." Police admonished the crowd for disobeying the cabinet order but did not force them to vacate (privately, several police officers told me they supported the strikers' goals and only refrained from joining the strike out of duty to keep the peace). PSA president Finau Tutone drafted an immediate letter to the Privy Council, requesting reversion of the cabinet order, while People's Representative Clive Edwards requested a court injunction. On the same day, the king tried to appease the strikers by promising an independent audit of the salary scales. The PSA executive and strikers responded that they would continue to wait at Pangai Si'i for the results. The next day, Chief Justice Robin Webber delivered his judgment

that the cabinet had no right to close Pangai Si'i.

On Sunday, 14 August, Teufaiva Stadium was again the site for a huge gathering—this time a church service in which an estimated five thousand people came to pray with the king for a solution to the strike. But His Majesty was upstaged by his democracy-supporting nephew, the Tu'ipelehake, who received applause and cheers when he stood to read a Bible passage. On Monday, the Public Service Association offered cabinet a twelve-point proposal for how to resume negotiations. It included the need for two arbiters—one for the government and one for the association—plus a mutually agreed “umpire.” As the association waited for the cabinet's response, the royal family traveled to Auckland to celebrate the engagement of Princess Pilolevu's daughter, Fanetupou Vava'u, to the grandson of the Samoan paramount chief, Malietau Malietoa. The irony of civil servants struggling to pay bills while the royal family funded a lavish celebration did not go unnoticed, and led to the first real strike-related violence within Tonga.

On 17 August, students at Tonga College were informed that their principal, Tu'amelie Faaitu'a, and head tutor, Lopaki Fifita, were being removed to the main education office in Nuku'alofa. Both had been supporting the civil service strike. Frustrated and angry, boys of the senior class began to smash computers in the school offices, then stormed outside and attacked the cars of the new acting principal, Kakala Unu, and an administrator from the Ministry of Education. Then they marched off

the school compound. Police arrested two hundred students and detained another one hundred until their parents came to retrieve them. Later that day at Pangai Si'i, a protestor read a letter threatening more violence if the government did not settle in favor of the strikers. In the early hours of 18 August, four cars parked in the Inland Revenue Service lot were torched and exploded. The following night, Sosefo Ramanlal's house was attacked with Molotov cocktails. Damage was minimal. But on 23 August, Uoleva, a historic house in the village of Tatakamotonga (on Tongatapu) that belonged to the royal family, was destroyed by fire. On the northern island of Vava'u, computers at the government high school were found smashed and classrooms ransacked. The damage was done in the early hours of 24 August, and police suspected students. Meanwhile, the king was still in Auckland, and his residence there was the focus of unprecedented protests, which were also tinged with violence.

A surprise visit to Pangai Si'i by Princess Pilolevu, recently returned from New Zealand, and acting as regent in her father's absence, may have helped stem the violence, which was shocking to Tongans on both sides of the debate. On 25 August, the princess wept as she spoke to the strikers and referred to the personalized attacks on her father. In response to her request that people return to work, Fotu Fisi'iahi, PSA secretary, asked her politely to give the requested raises of 60 percent, 70 percent, and 80 percent, so that they could resume working (such boldness was unthinkable just a few months

before). While people were impressed that the princess would make such a gesture, and hopeful that she would implement some positive action, they continued to occupy the park. Later that same day, two hundred supporters arrived from the island of 'Eua. They marched from the wharf to Pangai Si'i, followed by trucks laden with produce for the cash-strapped strikers. People had been without payment for five weeks.

Meanwhile, in New Zealand, Dr 'Ana 'Akau'ola, the kingdom's only radiographer and a member of the PSA executive, was participating in a hastily arranged speaking circuit, explaining why she supported the strike. She and Sione Fifita, a cleaner in the Ministry of Works, spoke to several groups about the strike, the pay demands, and how they could be funded. Their audiences were drawn from trade unions and social justice activists, Green Party members, elected members of the New Zealand Parliament, and members of the broader Pacific community. While they were in Tonga, Thomas Goddard, a retired New Zealand judge who specialized in employment law, was in Tonga, attempting to negotiate an end to the strike. Even though he had been invited by both the government and the Public Service Association, by 27 August he admitted defeat, saying he had not even been able to get the parties to agree on a process. Part of the civil servants' intransigence resulted from their growing realization that the best solution for Tonga was democratic reform. Thus, what started as a protest against the inequities of higher-paid civil servants getting raises while lower-paid and

longer-term workers received little or nothing became a platform for advocates of democratic reform. Strikers and democracy proponents coalesced into a natural and politically savvy alliance. While they had been touched by the princess's tears, the strikers were more profoundly affected by their own solidarity and success.

In the end, the strikers got everything they asked for. As supporters continued to arrive from the outer islands, bringing food and textiles as gifts to their Tongatapu confederates, on 1 September the Public Service Association delivered its most startling demand: that the cabinet resign and put in place a democratically elected Parliament. The People's Democratic Party, led by long-time People's Representative Teisina Fuko, had delivered a letter to the palace earlier in the strike (11 August), asking the king for a more democratic system in Tonga, in which the people of Tonga would take part in running the country by having the right to elect the members of cabinet, including prime minister and government ministers. This small petition was reiterated as a demand, one that the princess regent and her younger brother, the prime minister, must have taken seriously, given the recent violence and the overseas support for an end to the monarchy. On 1 September the Privy Council met, after which time the princess regent led her brother and most of the Privy Council members across to Pangai Si'i to deliver their offer directly to the striking civil servants: If the strikers would return to work that day, they would pay the 60-70-80 percent increases on an interim basis while negotiating a long-

term agreement. They would also set up a negotiating committee made up of the respected noble Fielakepa (who holds a graduate degree in law), Minister of Foreign Affairs (and former diplomat) Tu'a Taumoepeau, and Minister of Labour, Commerce, and Industries Feleti Sevele, a former People's Representative who had been made a cabinet minister. The final, and most important inclusion in the committee's makeup was Dr Sitiveni Halapua, director of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Center in Honolulu and expert facilitator with success in the aftermath of the latest Fiji coup.

The PSA response to the Princess Regent and Privy Council came a few hours later. They rejected the offer but were willing to enter into negotiations with the new team. Having put in the demand for an elected cabinet, and after weeks of domestic and overseas support for democratic reforms, there was a feeling among some members of the PSA executive that they had an opportunity to effect real change. Plans were already in the works for a pro-democracy march, set for 6 September. During negotiations, ironically enough, it was long-time democracy activist 'Akilisi Pohiva who counseled the PSA executive to accept the offer and carry on to fight for democratic reforms. On 3 September, all parties signed a memorandum of understanding by which the civil servants would return to work. The Public Servants Association, established in the early days of the strike, and with little training as labor negotiators, ended up with a resounding win for the civil servants. The pay raises were implemented as 60-70-80, but with the

proviso that the 60 percent increases would be immediate, while the rest would begin in the next fiscal year. Strikers were to be paid for the time they had been on strike, and the students who supported them (including the vandals) would not be disciplined. The memorandum also included provisions against government downsizing, especially at the expense of those who had participated in the strike. Another important aspect of the memorandum stipulated that the cabinet team members would raise the demand for a fully elected government with the rest of the cabinet. On 5 September, after forty-four days of striking, the civil servants returned to work.

Ostensibly, the protest began over objections to the salary revisions. In reality the roots of the civil action were laid several years before. For decades, Tonga has been described as having a MIRAB economy (based on Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy). As the main employer, the Tongan civil service has become bloated, cost-inefficient, and bifurcated: While some employees' job categories and skills were outmoded (typists, drivers, filing assistants), others required years of specialized overseas education (economists, statisticians, environmental scientists, health professionals). Tonga's long-term commitment to higher education has enabled a brain drain that benefits the nation and individual households in terms of remittances, but has done far less for internal productivity or efficiency.

Tonga's King Tāufa'āhau has consistently thought of himself as a modernizer, and under his reign the

government has sustained long-term and generally positive relationships with foreign advisers, aid donors, and lenders, including Australia, Britain, Canada, China, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan, the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Most recently, Tonga has been planning for membership in the United Nations and World Trade Organization. Tupou IV's reign has ushered in an increasingly import and cash-based economy, and a growing diaspora of the well-educated, with a local economy that has for a long time sustained an ideology of security and well-being through family, church, tradition, and household-based subsistence production.

However, recent reports have indicated household subsistence is no longer a source of security, and Tongans are experiencing real hardship. An ADB-funded team (in conjunction with local researchers) conducted an assessment of Tonga's progress towards the UN Millennium Development Goals for Poverty Reduction. The report, entitled "Priorities of the People: Hardship in Tonga," drew on comprehensive qualitative and quantitative research conducted in communities from 'Eua and Tongatapu in the south to Tafahi in the north. It flagged problems relating to the increased monetization of the Tongan economy because of high remittance rates; the urbanization and out-migration from rural and island areas, which created extra burdens for remaining rural residents; low growth rates in private economic sectors; perceived inadequacy of governance standards; weak private

investment; poor access to services and opportunities; poor quality of service delivery; lack of employment or other income-generating and technical-training opportunities; ruptures in the traditional Tongan kainga (extended family) safety net; economic hardship in a small but significant percentage of households; and increasing income maldistribution. The report specifically recognized that measures to alleviate the hardship required concurrent micro- and macro-level responses, with emphases on health, social, and educational service delivery to the more remote villages, opportunities for vocational training, improved governmental standards, private sector investment, and fiscal discipline.

The assessment, conducted in November 2003, came midway in the government's implementation of its Economic and Public Sector Reform Programs (underway since 2001), intended to ensure equitable prosperity for the nation in the future, and based on the overseas and internal economic advisers' arguments that with household income highly dependent on remittances, reduced numbers of households producing their own food, and limited avenues for improving the foreign trade balances, Tonga was headed for financial collapse. Aiming to reduce their costs, the government planned to downsize the civil service and encourage private sector and entrepreneurial businesses while preventing a brain drain. Privatization and corporatization of public enterprises would create the jobs to absorb the public servants who would be made redundant. Essentially, the ADB report confirmed the importance of

the Tongan government's reform directions and strategies.

The civil service salary scales were part of this neoliberal strategy to modernize the Tongan economy. They were intended to align remuneration with job skills, responsibilities, and level of education, and thereby reduce the incentive for high-skilled, prioritized labor to emigrate, but also to provide disincentives for redundant workers to remain on government payrolls. What seems to have taken the cabinet and royal family by surprise was the degree to which ordinary Tongans would object to this strategy of remunerative inequity. While the new civil service pay scales mimicked principles of remuneration common in the nations to which Tongans have been migrating, they were radically different from past practices in which seniority, personal history of service, job title (rather than skills), and (unfortunately) gender factored into individuals' promotion and remuneration. Rather than posing the question as "How can we make Tonga's economy more productive and competitive?" the strikers asked, "Why should those who are already paid so much more get raises?" and "What kind of government allows some Tongans to be so much poorer than others?" Those questions merged economic agendas with moral ones.

While such language was rarely used in Tonga, the protests of 2005 represented resistance to aspects of the neoliberal models of economic reform. Reducing government expenses through privatization, improving efficiency and fiscal conservatism through corporatization, and depending on private sector entre-

preneurialism to stimulate jobs are mantras that are by now familiar in all globalization scenarios. There is no question that some Tongan businessmen have succeeded in these sectors, both in Tonga and overseas. But for many Tongans, the model of corporatization of public enterprises is best exemplified by the actions of the princess royal (who controls Friendly Islands Satellite Communications [Tongasat], including the income from Tonga's highly lucrative geostationary satellite slots) and the crown prince (who, as minister of Foreign Affairs and chairman of the Tonga Electricity and Power Board, convinced the cabinet to give him a twenty-year lease to manage the board as his own company). The geostationary satellite slots were supposed to provide Tonga with the equivalent of Iraq's oil and keep the country wealthy, but the nation receives very little income from Tongasat. Tupou-to'a promised to make the business more efficient, thereby reducing electricity rates and improving services for Tongans. Shoreline did buy new generators, but they also reduced their staff from 120 to 20, borrowed heavily, and paid the three owner/chief executive officers huge annual salaries. As high-profile models for how the private sector will create jobs for the forthcoming civil service redundancies and meet the government's goals of a higher standard of living for all Tongans, both Shoreline and Tongasat have failed to impress.

The Tongan government's goals—attaining a higher standard of living for all Tongans and creating more efficient and effective public sector services—were, and remain, laudable.

However, by 2005, as world prices and local inflation rose, as the value of remittances waned, and as the changes introduced under the Economic and Public Sector Reform Programs began to be felt, the reality of the experience for ordinary Tongans was akin to that of East Berliners after 1989. Inflation hit double digits, some 23 percent of the population was experiencing incomes below the poverty line (T\$28/US\$14 per week), and many were having to make tough choices between food, school fees, and personal debt payments. Others, confronted with the novel experience of performance indicators, felt unfairly targeted by the shift in the culture of the workplace. Attempts to set the example for the neoliberalization of the economy and instill an ethic of efficiency in government ministries, coupled with the privatization of state resources, a history of poor fiscal decisions, and recognition that success in the changing economic environment depended on skills and financial backing not generally available to those civil servants that the government hoped to make redundant, all helped make the public manager of the reforms, Prime Minister Prince 'Ulukalala Lavaka 'Ata, personally unpopular. It also led to more vocal resentment of his elder siblings, the princess royal and crown prince, both of whom do have the wherewithal to engage in the kinds of private sector investment, entrepreneurial activities, and privatization of public services promoted by the economic reform plan. While the two are seen as competitors, they have both capitalized on their privileged status as royals to enable their entrepreneur-

ial activities and private wealth. At the same time, various economic and policy mistakes over the past several years have all come to a head. This was the context for the general strike.

Following the signing of the memorandum of understanding, democracy activism did not abate. On 6 September, as planned before the memorandum was signed, Tongans delivered a petition asking the king to implement major constitutional change within twelve months. On 12 September, thousands of people again marched to the palace to present the king with a petition demanding reforms to his absolute monarchy, dismissal of the prime minister and all fourteen cabinet ministers, establishment of an advisory committee that would include all of the People's Representatives to discuss how political power should be returned to the government, and, finally, the withdrawal of Shoreline's development license. News reports referred to the 12 September event as Tonga's largest political march ever. Local businesses supported the march with taxis, trucks, concrete mixers, and other heavy equipment. Even the immigrant Chinese, who are normally regarded with suspicion, participated in the march. At the time, people viewed the protest as a fitting finale to the civil servants' strike and the remarkable political turn that events had taken. In December, more pressure was exerted on the king, his cabinet, and the royal family, with proposals being presented for parliamentary reforms. In general, people have come to express support for a monarchy, which, like Britain's, is far removed from day-to-day governance.

These are difficult issues in Tonga: the monarchy is an important icon of national identity, and people remember that Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV established the first education scholarships. Loyalists opine that he foresaw this result and will therefore enable the move to democracy. Thus, even as political reform models are discussed, some resentment of the activists (especially 'Akilisi Pohiva) continues to surface among those who support some form of engaged monarchy. One of the results of the PSA strike is an increase in issues-based dialogue among Tongans; the sense that their opinions matter is perhaps greater than ever before. Soon after the memorandum of understanding was signed, two committees were established to discuss options and desires among the domestic and diasporic Tongan communities, especially those in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. Malakai Koloamatangi, 'Akilisi Pohiva, Sitiveni Halapua, and the Tu'ipelehake have helped spearhead these various consultations. At the same time, advocates of political reform have been concerned by the king's failing health. Privately, they worry about the crown prince's tendency to be heavy handed, impatient, and sometimes disdainful toward "ordinary" Tongans; his involvement with Shoreline and concern with self-enrichment add pressure to have the democratic reforms resolved before Tupou V takes the throne. (In fact, as this issue went to press, Tupou IV had just passed away in an Auckland hospital, after a long illness.)

Amid the very public critiques aimed at him, Prince 'Ulukalala Lavaka 'Ata tendered his resignation

as prime minister. Long assumed to be suffering under the conflicting models for leadership exercised by his elder brother and sister, and certainly unpopular for having tried to implement the economic reforms that led to the civil servants' strike, he resigned and removed himself from all cabinet committees on 11 February 2006. This was hailed as a victory by the Public Service Association. When the crown prince, acting as regent, appointed Minister of Labour, Commerce, and Industries Feleti Sevele as acting prime minister (a position that was confirmed on 30 March 2006), the international media focused on the fact that Sevele was Tonga's first elected, commoner prime minister. It was interpreted as a sign that democracy was coming to Tonga.

The facts that Sevele has a graduate degree in economics, was a successful Tongan businessman long before he was a parliamentarian, was a close friend of Tupouto'a, and had been speaking about how much Tongans and Tonga's economy were going to have to become "leaner and meaner" seemed not to cause alarm. Prince 'Ulukalala Lavaka 'Ata had seemed incompetent partly because even while trying to instill better business practices in government, he was sensitive to Tongan sensibilities, including the requirement to take the advice of his elder siblings. But Sevele (like the crown prince) has a history of rejecting Tongan traditions if they conflict with his financial interests. He has certainly initiated a number of actions to reform government and the civil service.

Soon after the strike ended, Sevele introduced the need for an Employ-

ment Relations Bill, and, despite its being against the spirit of the memorandum of understanding, supported the need for downsizing of the civil service through a redundancy package. The cabinet hoped to let a thousand civil servants go. At the same time, comparing Tonga's civil servants to Fiji's, Sevele pointed out the inequity: Annually, Tongans enjoy 36 days vacation, up to 42 days of sick leave, and a bereavement leave of 7 days. In Fiji, civil servants receive 10 days holiday, 12 days sick leave, and 3 days for bereavement. He made this point as part of a general statement that Tongans have to adopt more "modern" work ethics.

Since taking office, Sevele has restructured the public service departments, reshuffled his cabinet, and appointed the first woman cabinet minister, 'Alisi Taumoepeau. Sevele has also negotiated a T\$60 million loan from China. The loan is supposed to help balance Tonga's budget and provide the funds to buy back Shoreline, as well as fund development projects such as wharfs, schools, roads, and airport renovations, and pay for vehicles and renovations initiated for the meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum originally scheduled to be held in Tonga later this year. (In return for the loan, Tonga will support the One-China policy when necessary at the United Nations.) Yet even as Tonga is preparing to buy back its power generation company, Sevele is looking into an expanded and accelerated privatization agenda, including selling houses owned by government for the use of ministers and senior public servants and its 40 percent share of the Westpac Bank of

Tonga, privatizing Airport services, and reselling Shoreline (a New Zealand company has expressed interest in buying it). The civil servants' redundancy package has been negotiated, and a total of 817 accepted early retirement from the civil service on 30 June 2006. The early projections of a thousand redundancies were not met, but even with the gap, the Ministries of Education and Works were both considering hiring interim workers to help cover the immediate shortfall in labor. It seems that Tongans now have a prime minister who is much better equipped to be the architect of the very neoliberal reforms that were causing them discontent. It remains to be seen whether these reforms will lead to the generalized prosperity that is one of the goals of the Eighth Tongan Development Plan.

On the democracy front, the most recent news is tragic: On 6 July 2006, while in California to conduct consultations for the National Committee for Political Reform, the "People's Prince," the Tu'ipelehake, his wife, the former diplomat Princess Kaimana, and a friend, Vinisia Hefa, were killed in an automobile accident. The sudden loss of highly placed members of the royal family, elites who were thought of as sympathetic to the people's needs, came as a shock to the democracy movement. Sitiveni Halapua has taken over the Tu'ipelehake's role and will complete the report on Tongans' ideas on political reform to be submitted to the king.

Tongans have expressed vehement disapproval of their government's decisions in the past, most notably in 1899 when King Tupou II's choice of wife and queen almost sparked a civil

war, and with more frequency since 2002, when government tried to stifle a critical media. That action also triggered petitions, legal challenges, and marches. But nothing within living memory approaches the events of 2005–2006 for drama, mass participation, and long-term ramifications. What began as a protest against neoliberal reforms of civil service payrolls became a catalyst for changes that have already led to serious political, economic, and, perhaps most significantly, psychological ramifications for the Tongan people: The monarchy is not overthrown, but the sacrosanct status once enjoyed by the Tupou dynasty and traditional nobles is gone; their modern “tapu” has been broken.

Nevertheless, though democracy advocates can legitimately claim a moral victory and point to the promise of real changes in governance, and while it is likely that reforms will move Tonga toward a more democratic polity, the tangible responsibilities of the royal and noble elites to the nation will have been reduced, while their economic and symbolic privileges remain unchanged. At the same time, the restructuring agenda that stimulated the general strike has actually been accelerated by the strike’s resolution.

In addition to the economic effects, the general strike’s main results to date have been cathartic and charismatic: grumblings long expressed in private have been aired publicly and internationally; traditional elites have been forced to respond to commoners’ perspectives; alliances have formed on the basis of relations of production, education, and experience rather than

only on kinship ties; and Tongans around the world have been mobilized to discuss exactly what type of political structure they want for their homeland and nation. This has been a peaceable coup, and once again Tongans have demonstrated their remarkable tendency to appear to be following external trends and influences while persisting in doing things in their own way.

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TUVALU

The World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 provided the impetus for Tuvalu's first-ever National Summit on Sustainable Development, which took place from late June through early July 2004. Invited participants included several from each island (chiefs, elected councilors or kaupule, women, and youth delegates), representatives from each of the eight island communities on Funafuti, senior officials, ministers, politicians, and representatives from youth groups, faith-based organizations, women's associations, regional bodies (South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, Forum Secretariat, Pacific Regional Environment Programme, University of the South Pacific), and business houses. Four or five expatriate Tuvaluans working abroad (including myself) were also invited by the government to act as resource people at the summit. The purpose of the summit was to consult widely and map out strategies for Tuvalu's development over the next ten years (2005–2015). An estimated four hundred people gathered in Funafuti at the Tausoa Lima Falekaupule (Council of Elders Meeting Hall) for the summit.

In an attempt to demonstrate political neutrality, the government agreed that Minister of Finance Bikeni Pae-