

WALLIS AND FUTUNA

During 1991 and 1992, the French Territory of Wallis and Futuna celebrated two significant events in its history. April 1991 marked the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Blessed Pierre Chanel, whose martyrdom paved the way for the conversion of the people of Wallis and Futuna to Catholicism; July 1991 saw the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the granting to the islands of the status of French Overseas Territory (Territoire d'Outre-Mer, TOM).

However, for Wallis and Futuna, the most notable events of this period were the March 1992 Territorial Assembly elections. The seven thousand voters had to choose among thirty-two electoral tickets, and the results put an end to twenty-eight years of rule by the various right-wing parties in the Territorial Assembly. Following the 1989 election of representative Kamilo Gata, a supporter of President François Mitterrand's majority party, the make-up of the new Territorial Assembly confirms the change of political orientation within the territory.

Thirteen of the 20 assembly members are newcomers. The representatives are split into three political groups. The conservative RPR party (Rassemblement pour la République) holds 9 seats, one more than in the previous assembly, but it must do without the support of other right-wing parties such as the Union Populaire Locale or the Union pour la Démocratie Française, which are no longer represented. The group aligned with President Mitterrand's socialist majority party holds 6 seats, and the non-aligned group now holds 5, against one during the pre-

vious session. For the first time, there are two women members.

Soane Mani Uhila, territorial councillor for the small local party Taumu a Lelei (Wonderful Future), listed as non-aligned, was elected president of the Territorial Assembly by 11 votes out of 20, having defeated the incumbent, Clovis Logologofolau of the RPR party. In 1986, together with former territorial councillor Michaële Hoatau and Kamilio Gata, both members of the Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche party, Soane Mani Uhila, 32, had founded the Union pour Wallis et Futuna. In 1987, he joined the Force Ouvrière labor union and became its general secretary for the territory.

This profound evolution of the political climate in Wallis and Futuna can be traced in part to the recent appearance on the scene of a new form of social organization—the labor unions.

Union Locale Force Ouvrière, first under the leadership of Soane Uhila, then, following his election to the assembly, of Poï Fotofili, is the union that has benefited most from this development. With some six hundred members, Force Ouvrière was at the forefront of a number of militant actions, notably in the matter of water and electricity rates, and of the status of primary school teachers.

With two hundred members, the Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Chrétiens, founded in 1967 under the name Syndicat des Travailleurs Chrétiens, later known as the Union des Salariés du Territoire des Iles Wallis et Futuna, has been opposed to Force Ouvrière, particularly on the question of the status of primary school teachers.

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In October 1991, internal problems within the RFO (Radiodiffusion Télévision pour l'Outre-Mer, the French government broadcasting company in the overseas territories) section of Force Ouvrière led to the emergence of a new union orientation, close to the Confédération Générale du Travail, a major French labor union. So far, this new affiliation exists only among the employees of the broadcasting company.

Labor grievances, which had so far been limited to the public and semi-public sectors, began in 1991 to affect the private sector. June 1990 saw the creation of the Management Association of Wallis and Futuna, initially representing sixty private firms, in answer to this growing unionization of salaried employees. During its June 1992 general assembly, this management association voted to grant a third mandate to its president, Frédéric Drouet. One of the association's main concerns has been to defend the territory's preferential tax status, which has led to the establishment there of about fifty off-shore companies.

The growing importance of labor unions and the appearance of new union affiliations are mostly due to economic development, increased employment, a lessening of the territory's isolation, and the spreading of outside influences through the media, particularly television.

Although a major portion of the population is still mostly involved in subsistence agriculture and fishing, the number of salaried employees has increased significantly over the last few years, going from 925 in 1986 to 1648 by the end of 1991, with an increase of

19 percent in 1990 and 17 percent in 1991. The private sector, which accounted for only 17 percent of all jobs in 1986, has shown the fastest growth rate: 32 percent in 1990, and 39 percent in 1991. By the end of 1991, more than a third of all salaried employees (38 percent) belonged to the private sector, while 62 percent were employed by the public and semi-public sectors.

The isolation that has hampered the territory's development in the past began to improve in July 1989 with the opening by Air Calédonie International of a Noumea-Wallis-French Polynesia route to replace the old Noumea-Wallis-Noumea flight. This isolation was further eased when a new shipping company, Translink, began competing with the Compagnie Wallisienne de Navigation which had so far enjoyed a monopoly. Translink provides regular service between Noumea, Wallis, Futuna, and New Zealand via Apia and Pago Pago. This allows for more varied sources of supply (where in the past goods came almost exclusively from New Caledonia) as well as a substantial drop in freight rates. In June 1991, this competition led to some conflicts between the two shipping lines which, although not yet entirely resolved, have been met by a staggering of their shipping schedules. However, the Compagnie Wallisienne de Navigation retains an exclusive agreement with the territorial authorities for all government-related business.

During an official visit to Wallis and Futuna in August 1989, then French Prime Minister Michel Rocard inaugurated an international telecommunications center that allows the residents of

Wallis to watch direct television broadcasts from Radio France Outre-Mer in Paris.

During 1991 and 1992, as in previous years, political and social debates have focused on three main themes: water and electricity rates, airline and maritime services, and the status of primary school teachers.

The high cost of utilities, hard to manage in the context of a low-cash economy, together with the problems caused by obsolete production and distribution equipment, were at the root of a certain amount of social tension. In April 1990, the king of Sigave, high chief of one of Futuna's two kingdoms, was forced to abdicate following a public demonstration demanding a lowering of electric power rates. In June 1990, this action, led by the Force Ouvrière, resulted in the signing of an official agreement by the central government, the Territorial Assembly, and the union leaders to lower power rates in the territory.

In 1969, the Catholic Mission contracted with the government to take charge of primary education in the territory. In September 1990 Force Ouvrière started an action against the terms of this agreement that culminated in a month-long strike. Force Ouvrière's main demands concerned the granting to the teachers of benefits equivalent to those enjoyed by agents in government establishments. A temporary agreement was reached between the education department of the Catholic Church and the national education department. In September 1991 pri-

mary school teacher members of the Force Ouvrière went on strike again, demanding full-fledged membership of the civil service. The agreements were then extended to cover 1991, but although the 1992 school year began without further strikes, the question remains unresolved pending a decision by the new Territorial Assembly.

A recent census confirmed the magnitude of the emigration of Wallisians and Futunans to New Caledonia. In 1989, there were 14,186 Wallisians and Futunans residing in New Caledonia; at the time of the October 1990 census, the islands of Wallis and Futuna were home to a total population of only 13,705.

The Wallisian and Futunan communities in New Caledonia also experienced some political tension. Founded in 1989 to act as a third force alongside the loyalist Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR) party and the independentist Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), the Union Océanienne party has been increasingly critical of the RPCR. Union Océanienne went through a major crisis in 1992. Michel Hema, elected president of the party in September 1989 following the death of party founder Kalepo Muliava, was ousted from his post by a dissident group that forced an early general assembly. In July, this general assembly elected a new directing committee chaired by Aloiso Sako, Union Océanienne's former vice-president.

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