

**REGIME CHANGE AND REGIME MAINTENANCE
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

Discussion Paper No. 13

Tradition versus Democracy in the Kingdom of Tonga

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Published by
The Department of Political and Social Change
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
1994

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In recent years there have been some dramatic changes of political leadership in the Asia-Pacific region, and also some dramas without leadership change. In a few countries the demise of well-entrenched political leaders appears imminent; in others regular processes of parliamentary government still prevail. These differing patterns of regime change and regime maintenance raise fundamental questions about the nature of political systems in the region. Specifically, how have some political leaders or leadership groups been able to stay in power for relatively long periods and why have they eventually been displaced? What are the factors associated with the stability or instability of political regimes? What happens when longstanding leaderships change?

The Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific Project will address these and other questions from an Asia-Pacific regional perspective and at a broader theoretical level.

The project is under the joint direction of Dr R.J. May and Dr Harold Crouch.

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ISSN 1037-1036

ISBN 0 7315 1821 7

Printed in Australia by Panther Publishing & Printing

TRADITION VERSUS DEMOCRACY IN THE KINGDOM OF TONGA*

Stephanie Lawson

Truth is what the chief says, and history is what the highest chief says.

(Elizabeth Wood Ellem, quoted in Taliai 1990:215)

Introduction

Until relatively recently, what most struck outside observers of Tonga's conservative sociopolitical structure was an image which exuded stability, contentment, and durability. The only remaining kingdom in the entire Pacific, Tonga had also been the only island country to escape formal colonization during the period of European expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was therefore spared the turbulence which has typically accompanied most moves to decolonization. It is widely accepted that Tonga's ability to remain independent had been achieved largely through the development of a unitary, centralized political system, presided over by an indigenous monarch, and which incorporated major elements of traditional sociopolitical organization. This system was entrenched through the promulgation in 1875 of a formal written constitution which established the monarchy and a landed nobility, and codified a set of principles and practices designed to sustain them as a ruling class. The superimposition of certain Westminster-style institutions such as a prime minister, cabinet, legislature, judiciary, and electoral system, as well as a declaration of rights, gave the system some additional legitimacy in the European-dominated sphere of

* This paper is a draft chapter for a book entitled *Tradition versus Democracy in the Southwest Pacific*. It was prepared in its present form for distribution at the Tongan History Conference, Nuku'alofa, July 1993. Comments and criticisms are welcome.

nineteenth century international politics, although these by no means added up to a democratic system of responsible government. The concentration of power in the hands of the monarch, and the extent of privilege granted to the nobility under the constitution, enshrined instead the basic principles associated with the descending thesis of government. In this respect, there is little doubt that the provisions of the 1875 constitution resonated very clearly with traditional Tongan sociopolitical notions concerning the proper locus of political authority and legitimacy.

Writing in 1983, one commentator held that 'if "politics" is defined as a "struggle for power", there is comparatively little of it in Tonga' (Afeaki 1983:57). This accords with the image of stability referred to above and, at the time, was a reasonably accurate comment on the dynamics of Tongan politics. A decade later, however, a struggle for power has emerged very clearly, spearheaded by a determined pro-democracy movement which is pushing for significant reforms to the political system. There has so far been considerable resistance on the part of the ruling elite to these later developments, and the kind of democratic reforms advocated by the movement are unlikely to be realized in the immediate future. A much more remote possibility, however, is that the pro-democracy movement will simply wither away. The most recent general elections, held in early 1993, indicated growing support for its reformist aspirations—a trend which is unlikely to be reversed and which is bringing increasing pressure to bear on the ruling elite.

Although its protagonists were originally concerned with a set of specific issues concerning corruption and accountability, the pro-democracy movement is now presenting a significant challenge to the whole basis of government in Tonga and the system of privilege which it supports. While having no wish to dispense with the monarchy *per se* (indeed, loyalty to the monarch remains something of an article of faith), the movement and its supporters are seeking to reform the political system so as to bring it in line with a much more democratic form of constitutional monarchy and responsible government. Apart from the matters concerning corruption and the almost complete lack of accountability in the present system, proponents are also concerned with wider issues of social justice and equity for ordinary Tongans in terms of access to land, equal opportunities, and public welfare. The response of the privileged establishment (that is, the royal family and the nobility) has ranged from merely

attempting to ignore the movement and the pressures that it is bringing to bear, to some attempts at repression, persecution of pro-democracy leaders, intimidation, and misleading propaganda.

Some justifications for maintaining the *status quo* are based on fairly standard conservative arguments concerning the 'tried and tested' nature of longstanding institutions and the dangers inherent in meddling with these. Koloamatangi, reporting one conservative Tongan view on the viability of the present system, says that the supporting 'evidence' consists of little more than 'the fact that the system has survived for over a thousand years' (Koloamatangi 1991:12). Other arguments which emphasize the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Tonga's political institutions, and its basis in an equally unique body of tradition, clearly draw on nationalistic sentiments. While it may be acknowledged that this past was not entirely exemplary, it is nonetheless valued as a repository of important icons through which the romantic imagery so essential to nationalism can be evoked. In this respect, the emphasis on distinctively Tongan images reflects the universal tendency of nationalist thinking to exalt the parochial elements of national differences and national individualities (Kohn 1982:9). Another strong nationalistic rallying point, and one which has helped to shroud present constitutional arrangements in a mantle of sanctity, is the notion referred to earlier that these arrangements were historically instrumental in securing Tonga against foreign domination in the past and should be defended as a matter of pride, gratitude, and loyalty in the present.

At the core of many of these arguments, of course, lies an appeal to 'tradition' which supports the view of Tongan culture purveyed through the nationalist images described above, and which seeks to anchor the legitimacy of the present political system in the remote past. As one observer has noted, however, Tongan 'tradition' is neither timeless nor homogeneous, and this is clearly evident in the record of internal struggles for power which characterized the centuries preceding the formal unification of Tonga in 1875 (Gailey 1992:345). Many of the internal ruptures and changes were not the result of external influences, but arose almost entirely within Tonga's own political dynamics, thereby illustrating the point that pristine traditional systems do not necessarily, if ever, enjoy a state of natural equilibrium. Another commentator holds that the apparent stability of Tongan politics throughout most of the twentieth century is not a legacy of the distant past, 'but merely the projection

and amplification of an image which is historically shallow' (Campbell 1992:77). This raises once again the question of authenticity and the problem of invented as opposed to genuine traditions, the salience of which lies in the way the past may be used as a source of allegedly inviolable norms of political conduct in the Tonga present. The critical evaluation of present arguments centring on the issue of tradition and democracy in contemporary Tonga must therefore be grounded in an understanding of the Tongan past.

The origins of the political system

The islands which constitute the Kingdom of Tonga lie in three major groups (with numerous smaller islands around them) in the southwest Pacific region — southeast of Fiji and southwest of Samoa — and have a total land area of just under 700 square kilometres. Excluding the outlying islands, the three main groups comprise the Tongatapu (southern) group; the Ha'apai (central) group; and the Vava'u (northern) group. Out of a total of around 160 islands, some 36 are inhabited and these sustain a population of about 95,000 people. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Tongan islands were probably inhabited no later than 1140 BC — a date determined for the earliest radiocarbon-dated material discovered so far. Like the Fijians, the earliest inhabitants of Tonga were makers of the distinctive, elaborately decorated Lapita pottery (Douglas and Douglas 1989:552). There are no Tongan migration myths to account for the first settling of the islands. Rather, the myths convey the belief that the earliest Tongan people were created in Tongatapu and that they were 'small, black and descended from worms' (Poulsen 1977:7-8). Other myths concerning the genealogical origins of the ruling dynasty say that the Tu'i Tonga line, through which the present monarch and many of the nobles trace their ancestry, commenced with 'Aho'eitu, believed to have descended from the skies following the union of his divine father with his Tongan mother (Cummins 1977:64). Although, as one observer notes wryly, his method of arrival is questionable (Ledyard 1982:15), fairly reliable orally preserved genealogies support 'Aho'eitu as the actual founder of the dynasty in the tenth century AD (Cummins 1977:63).

Although there is little to tell us about the sociopolitical relations of the earliest Tongans, there are indicators pointing to the probability that the Tu'i Tonga line was founded by alien chiefly lineages penetrating the group and

superimposing a non-indigenous hierarchy on an earlier system. This is supported in part by the myth of 'Aho'eitu as a progeny of the sky, which implies the supremacy of an invading ruler, as well as by aspects of local chiefly customs which suggest the survival of forms from the pre-Tu'i Tonga era (Gunson 1977:91-92). Williamson's account of Tonga's early political system refers to a group of conquering 'Tangaroans' who, having subjugated the original 'pre-Tangaroan' people, adopted the posture of divinity while at the same time assigning commoner origins to the soil — hence the belief that they were created from worms (Williamson 1924/1967:138-41). The alien origins of the ruling Tongan dynasty is further supported by anthropological studies which have elaborated the theory of the 'domesticated stranger-king'.¹ Another commentator suggests that the idea of 'descent from the sky' was commonly applied to any foreign arrival, including that of the early explorers and missionaries. It is further suggested that the divinity of the Tu'i Tonga line may not have been properly established in local lore until the late eighteenth century when a new myth, implying supernatural legitimacy, became necessary to bolster the weakening authority of the incumbent titleholder. Thus the 'descent from the sky' trope may have been transformed from one which simply referred to a foreign arrival to one which attributed divine origin to the Tu'i Tonga line (Ferdon 1987:30).

Whatever the precise origins of the Tu'i Tonga line and the nature of the myths surrounding the ruling dynasty, it is certainly clear that a hierarchy of chiefly control developed from the eleventh century onwards and extended its control throughout the islands. The pattern which emerged, and which has left its traces in contemporary Tonga, indicates that a number of chiefs exercised effective control at the various local levels while paying homage and allegiance to the Tu'i Tonga. This figure, standing at the apex of the entire system, retained the spiritual and secular leadership of the islands as a whole (Cummins 1977:64). This lasted as a fairly well-centralized, unitary system until the closing decades of the fifteenth century when the twenty-third Tu'i Tonga, Takalaua, was assassinated. His son, Kau'ulufonua, instituted major changes in the political structure designed to avoid a recurrence of violence aimed at the person of the Tu'i Tonga. He split the duties of the Tu'i Tonga by creating a new title, Tu'i Ha'atakalaua, which he gave to his younger brother. This title was to carry with it the responsibility for the secular, practical aspects of government.

In a retreat from the more dangerous role of political leader, Kau'ulufonua retained only his religious functions, although he preserved all the honour and privileges that accrued to the rank of Tu'i Tonga. Nonetheless, the separation of power meant that the position of the Tu'i Tonga was weakened. As Goldman (1970:303) remarks, power was an attribute of hierarchy as well as a means by which hierarchy was sustained. When power balances were disturbed, therefore, as in the division of the Tu'i Tonga's powers and responsibilities, the end result was not its preservation, but rather the opposite.

Further important developments occurred in the seventeenth century when the sixth Tu'i Ha'atakalaua created another new title, Tu'i Kanokupolu, which he assigned to his son, Ngata, with the intention that he exercise firmer control over the troublesome Hifiho district. Through a combination of internal tensions, as well as some influence from increasing contact with external forces, this tripartite system began to disintegrate in the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, far-reaching formal constitutional changes took place. These were more clearly the result of missionary influence (by now firmly established in the islands), and had the effect, amongst other things, of breaking down much of the localized traditional chiefly system (Cummins 1977:64-67; Ledyard 1982:18; Marcus 1977:212).

The period of internal political instability and change described above was accompanied by something of a decline in traditional religious practices. Cummins (1977:77) writes that:

The modifications of the Kingship in the fifteenth century into sacred and secular divisions highlights the radical political and religious changes that were taking place. The murder of Takalaua was itself a desperate act of irreligion. Kau'ulufonua, the son who avenged the assassination of Takalaua, is reputed to have entrusted his back to the protection of the gods in a battle, and when wounded exclaimed: 'The gods are fools'. During the civil disturbances at the close of the eighteenth century sacred houses were in some instances destroyed, sanctuaries violated, gods and priests abused and ignored, and the Tu'i Tonga himself opposed in battle by his subjects.

The sociopolitical system

As in other Polynesian societies, Tongan society to the time of the 1875 constitution was based on a complex, hierarchical system of chiefly rule. Its monarchical

structure under the headship of the Tu'i Tonga, however, was quite unique in the Pacific, and some find it comparable only with distant systems of the kind which supported the Dalai Lama and the Japanese Emperor (Latukefu 1974:1). From all accounts, the chiefly system was one of the most rigid and severely authoritarian in the region. One commentator remarks that Tonga had the character of a 'chain of islands bound together by the battles of warrior chiefs who could at will, and with impunity, club any commoner to death' (Ledyard 1982:70). Another points to the degree of chiefly control in terms of resources: 'The chiefs owned all the land and could take what they pleased from their tenants and even kill them', and further: 'The arbitrary power and cruelty of some of the chiefs is manifest from the early accounts. The Tu'i Kanokupolu Tukuaho cut off one arm from each of his cooks and Ulukalala tortured and drowned his political enemies' (Gifford 1929:127). Goldman's analysis holds that in order to demonstrate its awesomeness, chiefly power was often exercised to the very margins of propriety and that the requisite meekness of the lowly orders provided a suitable contrast with displays of power by the higher strata (1970:302).

On the other hand, Latukefu (1975:9) notes that the key to the socio-economic system was an underlying principle of reciprocity which, when operating at its best, provided a stable and relatively peaceful lifestyle. He also says that by virtue of the fact that commoners served their chiefs with loyalty and devotion, and made their tributes as required, chiefs in these circumstances would find it difficult to deprive their people of land or otherwise abuse their authority. The reciprocity of obligations and duties (*fatongia*) on the part of the chief lends a more humane touch to the less appealing images described above (see Biersack 1990:49). Nonetheless, the real essence of the order was undoubtedly a matter of total, unquestioning obedience (*fakaapaapa*) on the part of Tongan commoners (Niu 1988:308).² The structural inequalities with which the sociopolitical system was suffused reached into every aspect of life. The forms adopted in artwork, for example, unambiguously reflected and defined the dimensions of social inequality. They permeated the entire range of artistic activities which included music, dance, tattooing, woodwork, and the production and decoration of bark cloth, mats, baskets and ornaments (Kaeppeler 1990:59-61).

Given these factors, it is hardly surprising that contemporary democratic principles have little resonance with traditional ones. As Helu (1992:140) points out, values such as equality and social justice have, as a result, been

enormously difficult to approach in practice. This is reflected in a Tongan expression which encapsulates the anti-equality ethic very clearly: *Oua e tangi ke tatau na'a 'a Taufa'ahau* (do not aspire to be equal lest Taufa'ahau be angered). At times, however, others have pointed to concepts which have some resonance with more liberal ideas. Hau'ofa, for example, maintains that the word *fa'iteliha* (unrestrained) is a unique Tongan term which expresses something of a democratic ethos in traditional Tongan culture (cited in Fonua 1992:11). But there is little doubt that whatever traces of liberal elements may be detected through such conceptual expressions, these have been almost completely dominated by what Hau'ofa has elsewhere called 'the basic authoritarian personality of Tonga' (Hau'ofa 1978:164). Furthermore, there are few grounds for believing that Tonga would have developed as a liberal society through a process of 'natural evolution': this could only come about through the impact of external influences (Helu 1992:140).

Tonga's polytheistic religious belief system naturally complemented the sociopolitical hierarchy. Every chief was possessed of some degree of supernatural power in the form of *mana* which was derived directly from the gods, and the higher the chiefly position, the greater the *mana*. In addition, chiefs were surrounded by a system of taboos (*tapu*) and, again, the higher the chief, the more complex the taboos. But while commoners were required, on pain of death or at the least a severe beating, to observe customary laws and taboos very closely, the obligations of chiefs in this respect were, depending on rank and circumstance, less strict. Following the pattern described above, it seems that the higher the chiefly rank, the greater the freedom to violate taboos without incurring supernatural wrath. It is also evident that murder, theft, and adultery were regarded as offences only when committed against a person of equal or superior rank, or if the stolen object was sacred (Latukeyu 1975:13). In all these respects, the Tu'i Tonga enjoyed the greatest privileges. He was also distinguished from all other Tongan males in that he was not tattooed, nor did he undergo the otherwise common circumcision operation. The ceremonies surrounding special events in his life (and death), such as marriage and burial, were much more elaborate than those of lesser rank. Moreover, he was not addressed in the ordinary language of Tonga, but in a special honorific language (Ledyard 1982:16). This practice persists to the present day alongside another special language level for the nobility. Thus the three broad levels of the contemporary

class system, viz. royalty, nobility, and commoners, correlate with three speech registers each containing a different, class-specific vocabulary (Karaliku 1977:48). The pre-Christian belief system described here clearly conforms to the type which Weber elaborated in his formulation of 'traditionalist authority', namely, that the cluster of norms associated with the system were, at least for the commoners, considered sacred and inviolable and that infractions 'would result in magical or religious evils' (Weber 1948:296).

Relations between chiefs and gods were mediated by priests, which necessarily empowered the latter to the extent that they were second only to the chiefs themselves in terms of political influence (Latukeyu 1974:4). Each lineage appears to have had its own deity with a priest presiding over rituals and the *fakahaeleanga* (sacred possessions of the god). The aid sought through the priest was at times accompanied by the offering of finger joints or even human sacrifice (Gifford 1929:317-18). An aspect of religious belief that illustrates the degree of alienation between the chiefs and the common people within the social structure concerns the Tongan version of paradise (*puloto*). Entry to *puloto* was open only to the chiefly class, while it was believed that commoners turned into vermin after they died — hence the term *kainangaefonua* (eaters of the soil) was applied to the lower class. Furthermore, there were no moral conditions attached as eligibility criteria for entry to *puloto*, so chiefs gained automatic admittance regardless of their conduct during mortal life, while the exclusion of commoners, no matter how exemplary their behaviour, was apparently absolute (Latukeyu 1974:8-9). Beliefs of this kind were clearly antithetical to Christian teachings, and the subsequent inculcation of the latter among the Tongan people necessarily produced a profound change in their entire way of thinking about the mechanisms of retribution and reward.

Associations linking the ruling strata with divine power and privilege have nonetheless continued to influence the way in which the contemporary royalty and nobility is viewed, and there remains a general belief that these higher classes are 'divinely pre-conditioned' as social and political leaders (Afeaki 1983:57). A general political problem with the ethos surrounding the ruling class in the present era concerns the apparent difficulty that many ministers and nobles have in accepting direct questioning, let alone the criticism that is normally part and parcel of a parliamentary system. Thus, while there are no constitutional impediments to freedom of speech— indeed such freedom is

guaranteed by the constitution - there are very considerable social inhibitions. This situation is further reinforced by a degree of self-interest on the part of those who may be subject to criticism and who have so far resisted calls for accountability (Hills 1991a:8). In summary, it is evident that the religious belief system was closely interwoven with and provided strong support for the traditional Tongan sociopolitical hierarchy and that its influence is manifest today, among other things, in the cultural norms and values regulating interaction between the different strata. The impact of Christianity, however, was decisive both for formal political developments and for diluting, at least to some extent, the ethos of the rigid class system with certain principles of equality and freedom.

Christian conversion

The decline in traditional religion noted earlier accelerated very quickly with the eventual establishment of Christian missions in Tonga. There had been sporadic contact with Europeans (*papalangi*) since the seventeenth century and early visitors included Tasman and, later, Cook whose early impressions led him to call Tonga the 'Friendly Isles'. By the end of the eighteenth century, a few Europeans including sailors, some escaped convicts from New South Wales, and missionaries, were effectively resident in the islands. Through trade and other means, Tongans were able to acquire European goods, including weapons with which local wars were prosecuted with increasing fatalities (Gailey 1987:146). The petty wars of this period, however, retained the character of previous internal skirmishes in that they were concerned largely with the control of local resources and were not necessarily provoked by external pressures. In any event, the scale and intensity of these wars was as nothing compared with the later civil wars which exhibited all the characteristics of holy crusades. These wars, which were essentially over Christian conversion and political unification, were finally to draw the islands into a centralized state structure presided over by a monarch and a landed nobility (*ibid.*:169).

Initial attempts to establish Christian missions in the islands had met with dismal failure. The earliest missionaries, having arrived in Tongatapu under the sponsorship of the London Missionary Society in 1797 with high hopes of

bringing salvation and civilization to the Tongan people, were forced to leave in despair after some had been killed and the rest forced to flee their initial base. The Wesleyan Methodists who followed in 1826 enjoyed greater success. Perhaps their most fortunate choice was to attach themselves to the paramount chief of Ha'apai, Taufa'ahau, who was later to become King George Tupou I. Christian conversion for leading chiefs in the ensuing period became very much a matter of political expediency. For example, Gailey's analysis points to the fact that Taufa'ahau, who did not convert until 1831, manipulated both customary and European means of consolidating power, and did not allow the missionaries to conduct a significant proselytizing effort until he was convinced of its utility in assisting his own efforts at political consolidation (*ibid.*:179). Latukefu also writes that after some initial resistance, other important chiefs who had suffered defeats in some of the ongoing power struggles became disillusioned with what they perceived as the failure of their own gods to assist them, and began to question the validity and efficacy of the old ways. They also came to believe that 'the way to achieve their ambitions of acquiring the wealth, knowledge, and power of the white man was to adopt his religion, for he must have acquired all these things from his superior and more powerful god' (Latukefu 1977:124-25). As for the lower classes, they had much to gain, including souls and the prospect of an afterlife, both of which had been denied them by the old religion (*ibid.*:129).

The subsequent spread of Christianity was relatively quick, and less than thirty years after the Wesleyans first established their base, virtually the whole of Tonga was brought within the fold, although not all as Wesleyans. In the years following Taufa'ahau's conversion, wars continued between various factions, by now attracting the designation of Christian and heathen. This was partially resolved by the conversion to Catholicism of many remaining heathens on Tongatapu by a lately arrived party of French Roman Catholic priests. By far the greatest capacity for influence, however, undoubtedly lay with the Wesleyans. This was partly due to its local development as a church which assimilated the key characteristics of the Tongan social structure. It was, in effect, 'a royal and chiefly church, with seats in the sanctuary alongside its ministers for those who bore the titles of royalty, nobility or high local rank' (Garrett 1982:80). And when Taufa'ahau (using the title of King George³) issued a code of laws for

Tonga in 1838, the opening lines of the proclamation clearly indicated the higher source of his authority: 'It is of the God of Heaven and earth that I have been appointed to speak to you ...'.⁴

It is evident from the nature of the wars during this period that the concerns of warfare referred to above had now shifted, under the impact of the new religious influence, from traditional issues to a battle between the forces for centralization and those who opposed it. The latter, however, were in the end unsuccessful in maintaining the *status quo* and, by the closing decades of the century, the Christian chiefs and their retainers would become a new landed nobility while Taufa'ahau, as George Tupou I, assumed the position of sovereign (Gailey 1987:171). The last battle of the era was fought and won in 1852 with Taufa'ahau emerging clearly as the victor. Having established himself as the most powerful Tongan of the time, he was soon to impose formal constitutional political uniformity over the islands and develop the centralized kingdom which exists today.

Constitutional development

There is no doubt that the dominant Western powers of the nineteenth century regarded their own forms of government as the only appropriate models for any country aspiring to the status of a 'civilized' nation, and that those backward nations which had not managed to develop the appropriate imitative institutions required both protection and political salvation — usually under the mantle of colonization. As Ferdon suggests, the sociopolitical system of 'traditional' Tonga hardly conformed to the Western ideal of civilized government, and the development of a 'constitutional monarchy' has therefore been seen as a vital factor in Tonga's relatively successful resistance to foreign control (Ferdon 1987:286-87).

The constitution that was eventually promulgated or 'granted' to the people in 1875 by Tupou I was preceded by a series of edicts commencing with the Vava'u Code of 1838. This first code limited the arbitrary power of the local chiefs and established, at least in a formal sense, the rule of law. In addition, it sought to establish the supremacy of the monarch. Ledyard (1982:57) observes that in formulating the legal provisions of the Code, the only assistance available was that of the Wesleyan missionaries and, as a result, it is permeated with 'both the influence of the Bible and of the typical, lower middle-class English thinking

of the time'. This was followed by the Second Vava'u Code of 1850 which elaborated many of the principles and practices established in the earlier code, further limited the power of the chiefs, touched briefly on land tenure, and defined the positions of the judges. The Emancipation Edict of 1862, as its title suggests, freed the commoners from the effective serfdom they had endured for centuries. One missionary response was to herald the new edict as the 'Magna Carta of Tonga' ('Tonga Circuit Report 1862', in Cummins 1972:153). It also contained a number of other measures, including a provision subjecting the monarch to the rule of law — an indication of how secure his position as undisputed ruler of Tonga had become (Latukefu 1974:206).

The constitution of 1875, which was strongly influenced by the Hawaiian constitution of 1852 and precepts of British constitutionalism, codified and expanded on the body of law established by the various codes referred to above. One important change brought about by the successive edicts, and more firmly enforced through the 1875 constitution, was the breakdown of local chiefly power. Most existing titled chiefships were not actually abolished, but were simply ignored by the new legal framework. Many chiefs became '*eiki si'i*' (petty chiefs) who, as Marcus tells us, were still able to pass on their titles and sit at the head of their *kava* circles, but found themselves effectively reduced to a status little higher than the bulk of the commoners around them. This resulted in one part of traditional Tongan society being more or less levelled rather than preserved in the new order (Marcus 1989:212). This was a logical sequence to the previous Codes and the Emancipation Edict which had done much to improve the lot of Tongan commoners and release them from the worst impositions of their traditional servile status.

At the other end of the social spectrum, however, a select group of chiefs was chosen to become a new landed aristocracy or nobility. Thus Tupou I, although seemingly anxious to reduce the power of many chiefs in the old order and introduce a more egalitarian structure at the mass level, created at another level an elite invested with enormous privilege. In what is widely referred to as a 'paradox and seeming blunder', the king appointed thirty chiefs as hereditary landed nobles (*nopeli*) as well as six ceremonial attendants with the traditional title of *matapule* who were also granted their own hereditary estates, thus 'carving out a permanent and constitutionally defined sector of traditional privilege in the new society' (*ibid.*:215). At the time, however, it seems that the

formal creation of the noble class was necessary to dampen the opposition of the most powerful chiefs to the new order, and to gain their loyalty and support (Latukeyu 1974:213).

With respect to the structure of power encoded in the constitution, it has been pointed out that certain desirable balancing elements common to both English and traditional Tongan law were largely omitted from the document. For example, no formal provision was made for the reciprocity implicit in the relationships between chiefs and commoners in the earlier Tongan order and, while the powers of the higher chiefs were clearly spelled out and made enforceable, the document made no mention of chiefly obligations, let alone provisions for their enforcement. Furthermore, the lineages of the royal families and nobles were no longer dependent on the recognition and support of the people — they now held their positions by virtue of introduced concepts of legal succession enshrined in the constitution (Powles 1990:145).

Briefly, the constitution, which survives to the present day with only a few amendments, is set out in three parts. The first, entitled 'Declaration of Rights', prescribes the general principles by which the monarch, judiciary, and government are to conduct themselves. The second part, concerning 'Form of Government', details the role and structure of the Privy Council (over which the monarch presides and which is the highest executive body although it has limited legislative functions), the cabinet (consisting of all ministers and the governors of Ha'apai and Vava'u, and presided over by the prime minister), and the Legislative Assembly (composed of all ministers, the representatives of the nobles, and the representatives of the people). It also sets out the method of ministerial appointment, the structure and role of the judiciary, and the law of succession to the throne, which was now to be based strictly on primogeniture. The third part, 'The Land', establishes the principles of inheritance pertaining to estates, deals with general laws of succession relating to property, and also contains a permanent prohibition on the sale of land to foreigners (see *The Constitution of Tonga* reproduced in Wylie 1967).

In general terms, the constitution locates the ultimate source of authority in the person of the monarch. This is reflected in certain prerogatives reserved to him or her; for example, the prime minister, as well as all the other ministers, are appointed by the monarch who is not required to consult with any other person on the matter. This means that the ministers are directly responsible not to the parliament (or, by implication, to the people), but to the monarch (Hills 1991a:5-

6). The pre-eminent status and powers of the monarch which are recognized emphatically by the constitution have been summarized by Powles as follows:

1. It was the reigning Monarch who, in 1875, "granted" the Constitution to the people of Tonga.
2. The sovereignty of the Monarch is declared in terms of the absolute authority ("Pule") to govern Tonga and its people (clauses 17, 31 and 41).
3. An important aspect of this authority is the Monarch's power over the Prime Minister and Ministers who are responsible to the Monarch for administering the government. The Monarch may dismiss and appoint at any time (clause 51).
4. All land is the property of the Monarch (clauses 44 and 104); and such estates will revert to the Monarch in the absence of an heir (clause 112).
5. The Constitution guarantees perpetual succession to the lineage of the Monarch (clause 32).
6. The reigning Monarch cannot be impeached (clause 41).
7. The Constitution which protects the Monarch cannot be changed without his consent (clauses 67 and 69) (Powles 1992).

Unlike the Westminster system, on which Tonga's governmental structures are superficially based, the Tongan monarch therefore continues to enjoy a great deal of real power. In Britain, the formal constitutional niceties of sovereign privilege simply represent the remnants of a long-abandoned 'working' monarchy. To date, however, almost none of the conventions which limit the formal sovereignty of the monarch, and which are normally associated with the theory of responsible government, have evolved (even though the constitution does not necessarily constitute an absolute barrier to such development). Current governmental practice, then, is certainly contrary to all the principles of modern democratic government as developed in the West, and clearly contributes to the lack of accountability complained of by the present pro-democracy movement (Hills 1991a:8).

The Declaration of Rights, however, does suggest some desire on the part of the constitution's authors to give effect to certain principles associated with more modern liberal values, and has been instrumental in securing the important right to freedom of speech in the contemporary struggle for reform. Even so,

there remain considerable non-legal obstacles to exercising such rights because of the social inhibitions referred to previously. The clause guaranteeing equality before the law is phrased in unqualified liberal terms: 'There shall be but one law in Tonga, one for the Chiefs, and commoners, and Europeans and Tongese. No laws shall be enacted for any special class to the detriment of another class; but one law equally for all persons residing in this land' (*The Constitution of Tonga*, Part 1:4). In general terms, however, there is no provision for the enforcement of all the 'freedoms' and 'rights' set out in the constitution. Moreover, the clause which declares the principle of equality before the law is embedded in a constitutional document which itself recognizes and entrenches (and effectively legalizes) traditional inequalities of privilege and status (Powles 1990:155).

Another important aspect of the 1875 constitution is the firm belief that its promulgation effectively secured Tonga against foreign domination and colonization. This is a common theme in the literature as well, and virtually all commentators affirm the apparent efficacy of the 1875 constitution in this respect. Gailey, for example, refers to developments in the latter part of the nineteenth century as being linked to 'efforts to stave off British annexation' (Gailey 1992:322). Similarly, Latukefu describes the 1875 constitution as marking the culmination of a process by which Tupou I was able to bring to Tonga 'the type of legal and constitutional machinery which would enable her to gain recognition from the civilised nations and maintain her own independent and stable nation' (Latukefu 1974:209). Although Tupou I was on record as wanting some form of British protection during the time of his earlier difficulties with rival chiefs, this by no means indicated a desire to come under foreign control of any kind. One indication of this was his steadfast refusal to sell any land to foreigners. He had also stated that: 'I verily wish to become a friend of Britain; in friendly alliance ... but it is not in my mind, nor in the mind of my people, that we should be subject to any other people or kingdom in this world' (quoted in Morrell 1960:312). Niu argues, however, that the threat of annexation in 1875 was no greater than it had been in earlier periods and that the 'granting' of the constitution by Tupou I was inspired more by a desire to reach a compromise between the chiefs than for external reasons of state (Niu 1988:306). Whatever the reasons, it is nonetheless certain that the ability of Tupou I to bring the whole of the islands under central control and establish a national constitution was a significant factor in maintaining Tonga's formal independence throughout the period of colonial domination in the Pacific.

This independence, however, was qualified to a considerable extent by the later imposition of British protectorate status which the 1875 constitution was unable to guard against. This came about partly as a result of further internal complications in Tonga, at least some of which can be attributed to the Reverend Shirley Baker, originally a Wesleyan but later the instigator of the breakaway Free Church of Tonga. Baker had been very close to Tupou I, and was the principal drafter of the 1875 constitution. His flirtations with German connections in the region as well as his political intrigues within the islands eventually led to his removal from Tonga under a British High Commission Order in Council on the grounds that he was a danger to 'the good order of the kingdom' (Garrett 1982:80). The domestic difficulties in Tonga, which only increased with the passing of Tupou I and the succession of Tupou II, as well as Britain's desire to secure a sphere of influence in the Pacific against other foreign interests, eventually led to the establishment of British protectorate status and a 'Treaty of Friendship' for the islands in 1900. This was followed by a supplementary agreement five years later, the terms of which 'fell just short of annexation' (Fusitu'a and Rutherford 1977:187). Tonga was now well within the 'British orbit' of influence in the Pacific, especially since Tonga's foreign relations and internal finances (which had been particularly chaotic) were firmly under British direction (Grattan 1963:391). Full independence was not regained until 1970 when Tonga's 'protected status' was revoked and Tonga resumed full responsibility for defence and external affairs. The Treaty still exists, but it now simply expresses a desire for 'perpetual peace and friendship' between Tonga and Britain. Tonga remains a member of the Commonwealth (*Survey of British and Commonwealth Affairs* 1970, 4(14) :606).

The constitutional system described here has been characterized as 'a masterful example of the integration of modern and traditional ideas of government' (Ferdon 1987:287). This depends, of course, on the perspective from which it is viewed. For its time, it certainly provided a much more liberal political framework than traditional Tongan structures allowed. Its 'modernity', however, has long since been eclipsed by the tide of events in the outside world, and it is often perceived by foreigners as maintaining an essentially feudal structure of power (Hills 1991a:15). Also, as Powles points out, the Tongan constitution today is very much out of step with international opinion, and certainly with the standards set by the Trusteeship Council and Decolonization Committee of the United Nations forty years ago: '[I]f Tonga had been a former

colony seeking independence under UN supervision, the world body would not have permitted Tonga to become independent without a more representative electoral system' (Powles 1992:3). But while the constitution cannot now be regarded as 'modern' in a meaningful way, neither is it a document which reflects an authentic, pristine traditional order. Marcus points out that the body of Tongan tradition that is under challenge today is an amalgam of earlier Tongan culture with a particular version of *papalangi* culture. In short, it is a 'compromise culture' that is now being defended as *angafaka Tonga* (the Tongan way) (Marcus 1977:210-11).

The reign of Queen Salote Tupou III

The daughter of Tupou II, Salote was born in the year of the Protectorate and came to the throne on the death of her father just eighteen years later. She reigned for almost half a century during which period she worked hard to consolidate the political system established by her great-great-grandfather, and the impression of Tongan political stability referred to at the beginning of this discussion can be attributed almost exclusively to Salote's efforts. Her ability to strengthen the institution of monarchy has been attributed partly to her personal popularity, and partly to her political acumen.

One of Salote's best known and most admired capacities related to her intimate knowledge of individual subjects and their family relations through their genealogies (*hohoko*). Marcus has pointed out that exclusive knowledge has always been a source of chiefly power in Polynesia, especially in relation to genealogical knowledge (Marcus 1989:201). The genealogies themselves not only provide an intelligible chronology for the interpretation of important historical events, but also embody Tongan notions of rank, seniority, status, and power (Herda 1990:21). By placing all persons and groups within a grid of historic chiefly genealogies, Salote was eventually able to identify each and every one of her subjects — no mean feat when dealing with a population of around 40,000. Salote's cultivation of genealogical learning also involved the selection and training of particular nobles, thereby ensuring that the special knowledge would not be lost (Marcus 1989:201). When founding the Tongan Traditions Committee in 1952, a body dedicated to the preservation of genealogical and other traditional forms of knowledge (or knowledge of traditional

forms), she declared to parliament that 'the customs of the people are its heritage' (Wood and Wood Ellem 1977:194). But the kind of heritage recalled through genealogical knowledge is one which can only be expressed in the idiom of chieflyness. As Herda points out, commoners of the pre-Christian era had no social or political reason to remember their ancestors. One implication of this is that genealogical credentials were important only to those who needed to establish legitimacy in a sphere of chiefly power and control in which commoners were, by definition, completely irrelevant. Herda goes on to argue that the 'traditional' Tongan past, being an exclusively chiefly domain, denies commoners a place in history because they have no means of access to their non-elite ancestors (Herda 1990:27).

Latukefu (1967:159) suggests that Salote's own impressive genealogy was an important factor in securing the intense loyalty and respect of her subjects. She was directly descended from two of the three major dynasties. Her connection to the Tu'i Kanokupolu line was through Tupou I while her mother was the great-granddaughter of Laufilitonga, the last Tu'i Tonga. This was reinforced by her marriage to Viliami Tungi, heir to the third dynasty of the Tu'i Ha'atakalaua, whom she also appointed to the premiership in 1923. While Salote's own marriage was not simply a matter of uniting the highest lineages for politically instrumental purposes, there is no question that Salote cultivated what Marcus calls 'a politics of kinship and arranged marriages' by which means she 'upgraded the status of selected titleholders by linking them to the royal line or one of its collaterals'. As measures of contemporary status, the 'great' aristocratic lines provided the standard against which prestigious descent could be compared. Under Salote, therefore, 'the official chiefly system reached a pinnacle of mystification during recent times' (Marcus 1989:201).

But Salote's command of the love and devotion of her subjects was not only a matter of her possessing impeccable genealogical connections, important as these were. From all accounts, her personal attributes as a generous, honest, and caring monarch did as much to consolidate the position of the monarchy as any other single factor. She was devoted to many welfare measures, and took a special interest in women in this respect as well as in education for girls. Public funds were used, not for personal benefit, but for the promotion of public goods in health, education, and other general facilities. Her knowledge of Tongan families and individuals extended to a personal interest in their problems. All

this was repaid by an intense loyalty on the part of her subjects, probably unparalleled in any other part of the world. Her death in 1965 marked the end of an era which is widely regarded as Tonga's 'golden age'.

Another feature of Salote's reign was a conscious effort to insulate Tonga, socially and politically, from foreign influences. Given Tonga's geographic isolation, this was not especially difficult and, until the mid 1950s, the only physical means of contact with the outside world was a monthly call by a New Zealand banana boat (Hau'ofa 1978:160). But while Salote guarded the mass of the Tongan people from the influences of alien cultures, it was a far different matter when it came to the education of her children. Her son and successor, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, completed his early education in Tonga but went on to attend school at Newington College in Sydney. From there he entered the University of Sydney and completed the degrees of BA, LLB, thus becoming the first Tongan to graduate from a university (Taulahi 1979:10).

In contrast with his mother, who undoubtedly believed that 'modernization and progress should be subservient to the continued vitality of Tongan tradition', King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV has been described as a radical modernist who has brought to the throne 'the seeds of political instability and change' (Campbell 1992:79). Certainly, he has done much to bring Tonga in touch with 'modernization' by opening Tonga to tourism and investment, encouraging the development of telecommunications, and supporting improvements in international transport facilities (Marcus 1977:211). These benefits, however, do not yet extend throughout the islands. In an interesting comment on the isolation still experienced by outlying communities, a media report on the 1993 elections highlighted the surprise election of the only successful female candidate. The candidature of Mrs 'Ofa  'Okalani Fusitu'a, who was elected as a people's representative (PR) for the tiny Niua islands of Niuaotupapu and Niuafo'ou (which lie in the far north of the Tonga group), went almost unnoticed until her electoral success was announced. One of the factors accounting for this was said to be poor communications: 'Niuaotupapu has a single radiophone with bad reception. The air service to Niuafo'ou has been cancelled since last October because of mango trees overgrown near the runway' (Fonua 1993b:22).

There is no doubt, however, that Tonga has experienced considerable change in the years since Salote's death and the accession of Tupou IV. Apart from infrastructure improvements and the growth of services, business, invest-

ment, trade, educational facilities, and increasing contact with the outside world, there have also been substantial changes in political thinking on the part of a growing number of ordinary Tongans, though perhaps not in a way intended by Tupou IV.

The Pro-Democracy Movement

The Tonga Pro-Democracy Movement (PDM) is said to have originated as far back as the 1970s in a relatively haphazard manner as a loose association involving mostly university graduates of the University of the South Pacific and some civil servants (Helu 1992:145). Issues of concern during this period ranged over civil service salaries, irregularities in the conduct of elections, the number of seats available to commoners in the legislature, and inequities in the system of land distribution (Campbell 1992:81). From the 1970s, one of the most active individuals in the movement has been 'Akilisi Pohiva, a former teacher from Ha'apai who was first elected to the Legislative Council as a people's representative) in 1987. Before then, he had been involved in various issues surrounding the conduct of politicians and in a controversial current affairs radio programme which critically scrutinized their activities. He was dismissed from his public service position in 1985 but later won an historic legal victory over the government when he took court action and was awarded damages and costs for unfair dismissal and denial of free speech (*Pacific Islands Monthly* May 1991:14).

Pohiva and several associates had also launched a broadsheet called *Kele'a* which raised political issues of public interest. In 1986, a whole edition of *Kele'a* was devoted to a critical expose of overtime payments to parliamentarians and its revelations apparently produced widespread shock throughout the islands, especially when court action over the affair was initiated against all but three members of the Legislative Council (Campbell 1992:86). Helu says that the kind of information dispensed by *Kele'a* fell 'like seed on a hungry soil', so receptive had Tongans become to this kind of critical journalism (Helu 1992:146). The elections which followed in 1987 saw a marked increase in the number of candidates seeking election; among these was Pohiva, who was elected as the third member for Tongatapu even though he was yet to be vindicated by the court over his dismissal. This election was also the first one in which political and

social issues took precedence over the more usual matters concerning local and kinship affiliations (Campbell 1992:88).

The tone of debate in the new parliament differed markedly from previous years, much of it centring around the question of public accountability. In the course of these developments, Hills reports that a number of people's representatives 'spoke in terms that were widely regarded as impolite and therefore un-Tongan, at least when used about nobles and ministers appointed by the Crown' (Hills 1991b:359). This comment again highlights the points made earlier about the ethos which continues to surround the ruling elite, and how traditional beliefs have survived to the extent that ministers and nobles have difficulty in accepting criticism and direct questioning as legitimate forms of conduct in the political sphere. One of the highlights of the period came towards the end of the 1989 session when an *ad hoc* walkout of the legislature was staged by all PRs present in the chamber after the number one PR for Ha'apai, Teisino Fuko, lost a proposal for the establishment of a standing committee to prepare financial statements for the Privy Council. On returning to the chamber, they came armed with two proposals: one to reduce the number of noble's representatives, and another to increase the number of parliamentary seats available to PRs (Campbell 1992:89-90; Hills 1991b:360). Predictably, neither proposal succeeded in a chamber dominated by nine nobles' representatives and the king's twelve ministerial appointees, as against the nine PRs.

Another prominent issue at this time included a major scandal over the sale of Tongan passports, many of them to Hong Kong businessmen and mainland Chinese, with lesser sales to South Africans, Libyans, Thais, and Filipinos — including the notorious Imelda Marcos. The purpose of these sales had been to raise foreign exchange. Apart from the principle of selling Tongan nationality, however, Pohiva and others were concerned with where the money from these sales had gone. Pohiva's requests for information in parliament elicited little response and in late 1989 he undertook court action. Public support for Pohiva's campaign was evident in an unprecedented street protest over the issue which attracted around two thousand people (Gittings 1991:10-14). As a direct result of this action, the government was later to convene an emergency session of parliament for the purpose of passing retrospective legislation to legalize the sale of 426 passports, which effectively amended the constitution (*Pacific Islands Monthly* May 1991:14). The passport 'scandal' and other issues of gov-

eminent accountability dominated public political debate in the period leading up to the 1990 elections.

A feature of the campaign for the 1990 elections was an active effort on the part of conservative forces to rally support — a move which had never really been necessary in previous years because of the lack of ‘issue campaigning’ mentioned earlier, but had started to emerge in 1987. By 1990 the need for the conservatives to strengthen their hand was becoming much more pressing, and there was an attempt to enlist church support on a platform of ‘church and state’ (Hills 1991b:365). In another unusual development, the king made some public comments during the campaign about the dangers of the demands for change getting out of control and the possibility of a *coup d’etat* (*ibid.*:366). Pohiva, who was seen as the greatest threat to the conservative regime, was accused of being a revolutionary and a communist. This had the opposite of the intended effect, however, and he gained considerable mileage from the publicity which was reflected in his spectacular win as the number one PR for Tongatapu with around 75 per cent of the votes cast in his favour (Campbell 1992:94). The overall election result for the PRs was something of a landslide in favour of the reformists, especially in the Tongatapu and Ha’apai constituencies. In addition, one of the founders of *Kele’a*, ‘Atunaisa Katoa, took the first seat for Vava’u (Hills 1991b:371). The 1990 election results therefore served to strengthen the claims of the group which, although not organized formally in any way, let alone as a political party, was by now taking on some characteristics of a formal political opposition (Helu 1992:147).

Encouraged by these strong indicators of public support, the reformist lobby continued to press for change. The establishment of the pro-democracy movement (PDM) as a formal body was eventually achieved in August 1992. According to its foundation chair, Father Selwyn ‘Akau’ola, the purpose of the PDM was not to function as a political party, but to ‘create an atmosphere where a dialogue by all interested parties could take place’ (reported in *Matangi Tonga*, July–August 1992, 7[4]:6). In the period leading up to the 1993 elections, a major conference with the theme, ‘The Tongan Constitution and Democracy’ was convened in Nuku’alofa in November 1992 to promote this sort of dialogue. For four days, Tonga’s political system received the full critical attention of a wide range of contributors, including some important church leaders. Around 400 participants, as well as a number of other observers, crowded into adjoining

rooms with closed circuit television, heard one Tongan church leader, the Reverend Siupeli Taliai of Tonga's Free Wesleyan Church, describe the 1875 constitution as 'ethically, criminally, and theologically barbaric' (Aiavao 1992:31). In his opening speech the Reverend Taliai elaborated:

In our beloved Tonga today there is still structural injustice after a century of so-called constitutional rule. Political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority who are able to command financial rewards out of all proportion to their actual work. This is why the pursuit of justice always labours under the disadvantage of appearing subversive (reported in Senituli 1993:22).

Many of the arguments supporting reform drew from Christian teachings about equality as well as secular notions of human rights, and were voiced in direct opposition to notions endorsing the sanctity of chiefs and the monarchy, as well as to older Christian ideas about power which had allowed early missionaries to portray the monarch as God's anointed leader (Garrett 1982:273). But to quote the Reverend Taliai again: 'The proclamation of the King as sacred in Clause 41 of the Constitution shows our heathen inclination, despite the fact that we are equal under the United Nations charter and in the face of God' (reported in Fonua 1992:9). Pohiva added his voice to the debate on the monarchy saying that since all other monarchies with absolute power had failed, the lessons of history indicated that Tonga's present monarchical system was also destined to fail in its present form. He added, however, that 'the monarchy which surrenders power is bound to continue' (Aiavao 1992:33). This last remark is in accord with a widespread desire among pro-democracy supporters to see the monarchy retained, but with substantially reduced political power. In this respect, pro-democracy advocates have affirmed their belief in a genuine constitutional monarchy rather than a 'constitution under a monarchy' (An expression used by Koloamatangi, 1991:11). They believe that a system which elevates the monarch 'out of the legislature', and gives him or her 'the dignity and ceremony of a head of state such as Britain's Queen Elizabeth', would provide the most effective remedy to the present problems (Aiavao 1992:32). One commentator has stated succinctly a major problem facing reformists in Tonga. Powles points out that the monarch has so far governed with 'a relatively benign and gentle hand'. He continues, however, that it is now 'a question as to how to protect the interests of the people against the possibility of a less enlightened and more interventionist ruler' (Powles 1992:8).

Apart from the substance of the matters discussed at this conference, which ranged over the full agenda of issues relating to the theme, the response from the government indicated increasing unease and defensiveness. This became manifest in a series of attempts at repression which included the refusal to permit any foreigners (including some of Tongan descent) to enter the country for the conference and instructions to the local government-owned radio station to prevent the broadcasting of any convention speeches or other news (Senituli 1993:22). In addition, it was reported that a number of plainclothes police were monitoring the conference, supposedly 'under cover'. The report stated, however, that 'because of the closeness of Tongan society everybody knew who they were' and that although they were there 'to intimidate by taking the names of those in attendance', few took much notice (Tiffany 1993:17). Initially, Prime Minister Baron Vaea had indicated that the government would take some part in the convention, but evidently changed his mind by early November when it was announced that the government would in fact boycott the gathering.

These developments had followed on from a lively session of parliament before the convention. Referring to a report from the Tongan Department of Health, which indicated an increasing incidence of mental illness in the country, Crown Prince Tupouto'a remarked that some PRs were clearly unbalanced and may have personality disorders. In elaborating his point, and citing Adolf Hitler as an example, the prince informed the legislature that: 'Personality disorders are characterised by the behaviour of a person who insists that he alone is right, and tries to win the rest of society to his way of thinking'. When one of the PRs attempted to interject, he was pointed out as an example of the kind the prince was speaking of (*ibid.*:18). This is not the first time that heated exchanges in the legislature had been reported. In an incident in the earlier life of the 1990-92 parliament, members had been instructed to go outside and 'cool off'. As the speaker, the Honourable Fusitu'a, followed Pohiva from the chamber, he apparently called out to the commoner: 'I'll kill you! What are you and how can a person like you challenge me?' (quoted in *Pacific Islands Monthly* May 1991:14). There is little need to emphasize once again the mind-set which produced such a reaction.

Another notable development on the conservative side of politics, just one month before the pro-democracy convention, was a meeting called by Prime Minister Vaea of cabinet ministers and the leaders of all Christian churches in Tonga. One of the issues discussed was the possible formation of a new political

party, to be called, somewhat perversely, the 'Christian Democratic Party'. More generally, the head of the government information unit, Eseta Fusitu'a (also an outspoken conservative and the wife of the Honourable Fusitu'a), announced that: 'Both the Ministers and the church leaders reiterated their belief that Tupou I's well-proven method of Church and State combining to deal with the affairs of the nation, was still the best method for Tonga' (*Matangi Tonga* September–November 1992, 7[5]:5). In another report, however, it was suggested that most church leaders were in fact unhappy with the idea of a party which combined government and church members and that many were concerned that the government was simply trying to use the church to further its own agenda. An outspoken critic of the government and a strong pro-democracy supporter, the Catholic Bishop Patelisio Finau, described the government's plan to form a political party using the churches as devious and manipulative (*Pacific Islands Monthly* January 1993:19). Furthermore, it is evident from the number of church leaders speaking in favour of reform at the pro-democracy convention that the establishment had not been able to swing the churches solidly behind their cause. If anything, the opposite had become the case.

In view of the government's attempts to institute a 'church and state' platform, thereby involving church leaders directly in the sphere of politics, it is ironic that some church leaders have had to defend the position they have taken in support of democratic reforms and their active involvement in the pro-democracy movement. The late Bishop Finau, for example, was explicitly criticized for his activities in this respect and for speaking out against what he saw as the injustices in the present political system. He was reported as clashing with both the king and Crown Prince Tupouto'a, who have apparently accused him of being 'a marxist and an agent of the pope' (Fonua 1991:54). On another occasion, the bishop stated that although he did not believe the church should become involved in formal party politics, it nonetheless had a duty to concern itself with issues of social justice. In addition, he said that the church 'cannot unconditionally accept what the government says, but [has] to measure what the government does and help those without a voice' (quoted in Aiavao 1993:33). In a further comment on the problems posed by Tongan culture for reformist aspirations, the bishop argued that traditional attitudes to power were of the domineering kind with little or no recognition of consultation as a desirable practice. He added: 'This is not the way Christian power is meant to be and [so] there is a clash between our cultural way and Christian leadership' (*ibid.*:54).

Despite moves on both sides to institute more formal mechanisms of political organization, party organization was notably absent during the campaign for the 1993 elections, which started shortly after the conference. As before, each of the candidates ran as an individual, although a number were clearly identifiable as pro- or anti-democracy supporters, and the pro-democracy supporters ran more or less as a team in the Tongatapu constituency. A record number of 55 candidates contested the nine seats reserved for PRs, but pro-democracy supporters or sympathizers again proved the most successful, dominating the seats in Tongatapu, Ha'apai, and Vava'u. One report noted as significant the defeat of the outspoken pro-government member from Ha'apai, Viliami Afeaki (Morton 1993b:11). The single PR returned for 'Eua, however, is a matapule and therefore predictably 'traditional' in his approach to politics. The other PR returned was the successful woman candidate from the Niuas mentioned earlier (see Fonua 1993a:20-22). Although virtually nothing was known about her views on the pro-democracy cause at the time of her election, there was no doubting those of one of her unsuccessful opponents, the sitting PR for the Niuas, Siaki Kata. An article published in the lead-up to the election reported that Kata was a firm supporter of the *status quo*, believing that there were no benefits to be gained from changing the constitution or curbing the power of the monarch. On the contrary, Kata proclaimed that: 'The people of the Niuas believe the King should have the power because he is a Christian and he knows what to do. In addition he was the first one to have the best education in Tonga' (Morton 1993a:13).

The conservative reaction

Both local and overseas press reports heralded the election results as a significant triumph for the reformist cause. Pohiva certainly saw it in these terms, claiming that the results indicated a clear mandate for reform and conveyed an unambiguous message along these lines to the government (quoted in Morton 1993b:11). But conservative spokespeople could not agree. Eseta Fusitu'a claimed that the result could as easily be interpreted as a victory for the pro-government camp because the actual votes cast — rather than the number of seats won — indicated a decline in support for the pro-democracy candidates since the last elections in the order of 6,000 votes (reported in Aiavao 1993:33). If anything reflected an indisputable increase in support for the conservative side, however, this was

manifest in the elections for the noble seats which took place a week before the election of PRs. Among the nine nobles elected were four new representatives, 'all of whom seem[ed] more conservative than the ones they replaced' (Senituli 1993:24). But in view of the overall results, there is little doubt that the reform mood among the commoners in Tonga had been maintained throughout the period since the 1987 elections. This was despite concerted efforts by conservative elements to undermine the pro-democracy movement and its aims before and during the campaign.

A prominent critic of the establishment, Professor Futa Helu of Tonga's Atenisi Institute⁵, said that in the period immediately following the November convention, Radio Tonga had been dominated by a Premier's Office program which dwelt at length on the evils of democracy. In what can only be described as an absurd attempt to impair the reformist cause, the programme actually pointed to the misfortunes of the modern Greeks — heirs to the original inventors of democracy — and made claims about the position of Greeks today as being confined to working in restaurants and related occupations (Helu 1993a:43). The implication to be drawn from this was that a democratic heritage should be regarded as a distinct disadvantage and, presumably, that the Tongan tradition of authoritarian rule was much to be preferred. A further inference of the programme's message is that not all traditions are of equal value or intrinsic worth — an inference which, *inter alia*, supports nationalistic claims based on the relative merits of Tonga's own political traditions *vis-à-vis* those of the democratic West.

In other efforts to belittle the pro-democracy conference, the Honourable Fusitu'a was reported as saying that many of those in attendance were just 'academics enjoying a bit of a holiday' and that 'the ripple' would fade quickly (Morton 1993a:13). A few days before the elections, Police Minister 'Akau'ola spoke on Radio Tonga about the implications of the pro-democracy demands. He warned explicitly about the dangers of 'rebellion', stating that acts of this kind included promoting hatred of the monarch and government, conducting protest marches, and bringing in foreign doctrines (Morton 1993c:13). He also reminded listeners that it was an offence to destabilize the state and challenge the authority of the king, and that the penalties for treason included the death sentence. The government-controlled station also replayed a speech given by Queen Salote calling on Tongans to uphold their traditions (Aiavao 1993:33).

Shortly after the Honourable 'Akau'ola made his remarks, however, Prime Minister Vaea contradicted him to the extent of saying that the pro-democracy movement was free to air its opinions (Morton 1993c:13). In another report on the elections, Helu wrote that Radio Tonga broadcasts during the three days before the elections consisted of an 'orchestra of denunciation', a bombardment of 'reactionary and antidemocratic propaganda', and 'inflated and terrorising rhetoric' (Helu 1993b:23). After the elections, Pohiva stated that at meetings with electors during the campaign, some nobles had claimed that the introduction of democratic reforms would lead to the removal of the king, that people would lose their land, and that Tongan customs and traditions generally would be affected for the worse (Morton 1993c:13).

The government's stance on the reforms espoused by the pro-democracy movement — a stance which amounted to unconditional support for the *status quo* — remained unchanged after the elections. Indeed, their position was explicitly reaffirmed in a unequivocal statement issued by Prime Minister Vaea who was reported as saying, in effect, that: 'Tongan people did not want democracy ... they liked having an elite leadership drawn from noble background ... [and] were quite happy living with their traditions and accepted the role of hierarchy' (Morton 1993b:12). A further report carried in the local press quoted another government minister, the Honourable Ma'afu Tuku'i'aulahi, on his reaction to suggestions that the nobles' seats be either abolished or elected by the people. According to the Honourable Ma'afu, the best solution for Tonga to such proposals was to adopt Mao Tse Tung's view of power, namely, that it 'comes out of the barrel of a gun'. He continued:

We are a warring people and if you are talking about power, then we are talking about war It is absolutely unrealistic to think that you could talk your way in and take away the power of the nobles or the government without any violent confrontation, it is unheard of, it has never happened If you want power you have to fight for it (*Matangi Tonga* March-April 1993, 8[1]:23).

Oddly enough, ideas relating to this theme have also been used by pro-democracy supporters. One speaker at the November conference, prominent Tongan academic Epeli Hau'ofa of the University of the South Pacific, recalled that Taufa'ahau was not the heir to the Tu'i Kanokupulo title, but had achieved it through conquest, thereby earning recognition of his leadership ability.

Hau'ofa went on to point out that Taufa'ahau's introduction of hereditary positions such as those created for the nobles had put an end to competition — an end which also heralded 'the beginning of weakness and the unfit' (Hau'ofa 1992:12). Rather than endorsing violent warfare as a means of legitimate competition, though, Hau'ofa's position undoubtedly reflects the characterization of modern democratic politics in terms of a competitive, but non-violent, struggle which has been expressed as the reversal of Clausewitz's famous dictum, that politics is the prosecution of war by other means (see Sartori 1987:42).

Another general line of argument used by conservative opponents of the reform movement draws on relativist arguments concerning the merits, or demerits, of democracy. An interview with Eseta Fusitu'a on the subject of contemporary political developments in Tonga elicited the following views on the constitution and democracy:

A constitution embraces the fundamental features of a country, when it does not, that country is in trouble. When you talk about this so-called democracy you are talking about a model associated with a western society. The Westminster model in India makes no provision for the multiple religions there, so the model remains but the society suffers.

In Samoa, one of the original drafters (of the constitution), Jim Davidson, was conversant with Samoan society, so the constitution stipulated only Samoan *matai* (chiefs) could vote and only *matai* could be candidates. Put that Samoan model against the Australian model and they'll say 'bad, bad'. The 1991 constitutional change (giving adult Samoans universal suffrage but only permitting *matais* as candidates) is not entirely Westminster, but still reflects Samoa, and that's the way it should be. Our Tongan parliament was meant to reflect our multiple criteria for leadership — age, seniority and traditional leaders. If you look at that with palagi eyes we'll never understand each other (*Islands Business Pacific* December 1992:33-34).

The latter point emphasizes the especially problematic view of a particular culture as something which is enclosed in a falsely abstracted horizon. Put simply, it denies the possibility that all 'alien horizons' are open to understanding. It is for this reason that diverse thinkers have been sharply critical of the 'myth of the framework' — the myth which insinuates that 'we are forever enclosed in our own horizons, our own paradigms, [and] our own cultures' (Bernstein 1983:143, 167).

Finally, it is worth recording here the views of Prince Fatafehi Tu'iipelehake, younger brother of the king and prime minister of Tonga for over twenty-five years until his retirement in 1991. Responding to a question on whether he supported the theory that cabinet would be stronger if its members were elected by the people, the prince indicated his opposition to the idea. His reason for supporting the present system? The belief that very few people had a sufficient or clear understanding of what goes on in the world beyond Tonga. 'Our local politicians are only good enough within Tonga, when we move out to the international arena ... the best approach for government [is] to call in only our capable people' (*Pacific Islands Monthly* October 1991:14). And in answer to a further question on the best possible political system for Tonga:

One thing that we should always remember is that no-one else knows what is best for us other than ourselves. We all talk about democracy but we do not know what it looks like. It has a different shape and a different colour for different countries ... Here it is different, people are just going about their daily lives, and when the breadfruit is in season they are very happy. I do not know what [you] would call that, carefree or what, but you can't talk to people like that about democracy (*ibid.*:15).

The clear implication of these remarks is that commoners have neither the political skills nor the wisdom, nor even the potential, to participate at a higher level of responsibility than that accorded by the present constitution. It follows that these qualities are believed to be the preserve of a ruling class which alone carries in its royal or noble blood lines the requisite capacity to serve as leaders in government. Nor is there any faith in the judgement of the common people to select leaders or choose between policy alternatives put forward by groups competing for power. Attitudes of this kind may be held sincerely, or may be prompted simply by a desire to maintain the *status quo* for self-interested motives. Either way, there is little reason to expect that people holding such perspectives on politics can be persuaded to reverse their views in the immediate future. And since the ruling class, which is evidently imbued with these views, holds all the power, the prospects for change do not seem imminent.

Conclusion

The activities of the pro-democracy movement may not yet have achieved anything in the way of tangible political reform, but they have certainly brought

into the open many of the attitudes and perspectives characterizing both sides of the debate about political change in Tonga — a debate which is readily characterized in terms of tradition versus democracy. The reformist challenge, which has been carried forward in a framework of Western democratic norms and human rights principles, is clearly anathema to the present incumbents whose legitimacy and authority ostensibly derive from blood lines reaching back into the remote past, and through which flows the essence of Tongan 'tradition'. It is in this sense, broadly speaking, that tradition and democracy are construed as opposing forces in a situation of changing political dynamics. Quite apart from the practical institutional reforms that must accompany moves to greater democratization, the pro-democracy movement clearly has a very difficult battle ahead in confronting fixed attitudes and challenging conventional wisdom about the legitimate source of political authority.

The discussion in this paper has made clear the necessity for the movement to overcome deeply entrenched normative beliefs about the structure of 'traditional' society and the values embodied in it. The development of democratic norms relating to a faith in the innate capacity of common people to exercise political judgement, as well as to perform the duties of political office, has been inhibited by the pervasive influence of a longstanding social system which does not recognize this capacity, let alone the political rights which are presumed to underscore it. As suggested in the foregoing discussion, the cluster of values which are at the core of this social system are expressed in the differential qualities deemed proper to two distinct classes of people. In Tonga, this system has been depicted as demanding a morality of *talangofua* (obedience), of *mateaki* (loyal) character, of *ofafonua* (love of the land) and of *angalelei* (good behaviour) on the part of the *tu'a* (commoner). For the upper strata, a quite different set of qualities is expected, including *to'a* (bravery), *fa'a* (prowess), *fie'eiki* (chieflikeness) and *fiepule* (dominance). Thus the values embodied in the two sets of expectations have produced two opposed moralities, with one being completely subordinate to the other (Kolo 1990:3). The moralities are nonetheless symbiotic or at least complementary — thus neither has any real meaning unless it is understood in opposition to the other, and the negation of one logically entails the negation of the other.

It is further suggested that the corpus of Tongan myths, the *talatapu'a*, function ideologically to fortify the oppressive elements of Tongan society. In illustrating this point, Kolo outlines the political dimensions of the *talatapu'a*:

Many of the *talatapu'a* can be said to be aristocratic in nature; they deal with aristocratic figures and views. *Tu'a* are expected to believe that events told in these myths are actualities and historically true. In ceremonial speeches, we speak mythologically and symbolically, paying our utmost respect to the chiefly classes, the Kings and the Queens (*ibid.*).

This interpretation of the way in which myth is presented, and the function that it can serve, feeds back into the general idea that an historically situated notion of culture, expressed through the concept of a society's unique traditions, can serve as an ideological buttress to the power and privilege of traditional elites in a modern context. This is despite the fact that the conditions under which power configurations were originally developed and sustained, and under which the legitimating ideologies emerged and became assimilated as part of the culture, have undergone radical changes (see Keesing 1991:4).

Just as circumstances change, so too can attitudes — even those most ardently and passionately held. This is most clearly evident in the revolution in thinking on the part of Tongan commoners which has taken place over the last few years. Helu maintains that the present situation would have been unthinkable twenty years ago. Given that Tonga had 'the most severely conservative culture this side of the equator', the extent and openness of the criticism now being directed at the highest established authorities represents an extraordinary turnaround in the way that people think (Helu 1992:142). One of the few things that remains unchanged, however, is the desire of the elite (like the desire of elites almost everywhere) to maintain power even in the face of compelling demands for reform. These demands reflect a global backlash against all manner of authoritarian rule and, although few have been as benign as Tonga's, the political system there has increasingly acquired the characteristics of an anachronism. As one commentator has put it, Tonga is at risk of becoming 'a country of primarily antiquarian interest'. He continues, however, that while Tonga's people do prize much of their history and value the elements of culture which make them distinctive, they would not wish to become an animated museum of anthropology (Hills 1991a:10).

Notes

- ¹ See Marcus 1989, especially pp.189–190. The ‘stranger-king’ phenomenon was evident not only in Tonga, but throughout other parts of Polynesia.
- ² The term does not necessarily imply enforced obedience since it also encapsulates a sense of obligation based on loyalty and devotion. I am grateful to Barbara McGrath for pointing this out.
- ³ The missionary papers of Reverend Peter Turner indicate that he chose the name George at his baptism in 1831 ‘because he said he heard so many good things spoken about of the good King of England and he wished to imitate him’ (see Cummins 1972:61).
- ⁴ ‘The Code of Vava’u’ is reproduced in Cummins 1972:105.
- ⁵ The Atenisi Institute, of which Helu is both founder and director, is a liberal arts institution which operates in accordance with a philosophy of education and an emphasis on critical thinking going back to the ancient Greeks (the name Atenisi is itself a Tongan rendering of Athens). In this respect it stands out as an unusual institution not only in Tonga, but in the South Pacific generally (see *Matangi Tonga* January–February 1992, 7[1]:10).

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