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Wallis and Futuna

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vailed. In the absence of facts, rumors abound with regard to the way the downsizing of the public service will take place, and many civil servants are at present restless and distressed, as they are unsure of their future and remain in the dark about the circumstances of their employment.

KERRY JAMES

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### WALLIS AND FUTUNA

On 29 November 2001, French Overseas Secretary of State Christian Paul went to Wallis, where he declared: "I intend that the assistance of France shall not slacken." He confirmed the future opening of a vocational training center and the future implementation of a statute for members of parliament. He proposed the creation of a development council made up of all the local decision makers. In December, it was Didier Quentin, overseas secretary-general of the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), and Pierre Frogier, president of the government of New Caledonia (of the party, *Rassemblement pour La Calédonie dans la République* [RPCR]), who went to Wallis to take their turn in preparing for the upcoming elections. The signing of the special agreement between the French Overseas Territory of Wallis and Futuna and

the French Overseas Country of New Caledonia was once again postponed. In the meantime a guidance document on economic development was signed in Paris on 22 January 2002 between the state and the territory in the presence of customary leaders. This document was to be followed by a program contract along with a significant financial initiative.

The year 2002 was significant on the electoral level. First, the election in a single ballot of the twenty territorial advisers took place on 10 March. Thirty-two lists, bringing together a total of 134 candidates, were submitted to 9,353 voters. Of those eligible, 82.7 percent voted. Spoiled ballot papers accounted for 0.75 percent, and 9.8 percent were proxy votes. The elections yielded a right-wing majority affiliated to the national RPR party. On 26 March, Patalione Kanimoa was reelected president of the territorial parliament by 12 votes to 7, with one member absent for health reasons. The opposition unified for the election of the committee of the territorial parliament, in spite of the fact that it included as many right-wing personalities (eg, Soane Uhila) as left-wing elected officials (eg, Donald Mercier).

The 5 May 2002 election of Jacques Chirac as president of the French Republic facilitated the reelection of the RPR member of parliament of Wallis and Futuna. At the time of the parliamentary elections in June, outgoing Deputy Victor Brial was opposed by four other candidates. His two main opponents (Soane Uhila and Kamilo Gata) did not come forward as candidates, but they supported Penisio Tialetagi, a tradesman whose campaign speech privileged the per-

sonalization of the (“anti-Brialism”) debate. Brial, the candidate of the Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle (UMP), benefited in the second ballot from the partial transfer of Apeleto Likuvalu’s votes, although he only won by 58 votes. For the first time, Gaston Lutui, a Wallisian known for his very diverse political career, came forward as candidate for the National Front (FN), an extreme right-wing national party. However, he did not manage to capitalize on the 492 votes that had gone to the national leader of this party at the time of the presidential election.

With regard to New Caledonia, the political authorities of Wallis and Futuna consider that the expatriate community must be especially careful and discrete. Under the care of the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RDO), a party affiliated to the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste (FLNKS), and with the participation of a socialist party executive from France, a day of reflection in August 2001 brought together about sixty young Caledonians of Wallisian and Futunian origin. On 11 October, about fifteen Caledonian pupils of Wallisian and Futunian origin destroyed the office of the headmaster of a Catholic technical school in Bourail. Indeed, at the end of August abusive graffiti by young people from a nearby tribe had called for the departure of this community. The culprits were not punished. Thanks to the arrival of Wallis and Futuna’s senator, calm returned after a customary ceremony of forgiveness.

On 13 November 2001, another problem arose in Saint-Louis: young Wallisian and Futunians set up road

blocks following the previous day’s stoning by Melanesians of a school bus bringing Polynesian children back to the Wallisian and Futunian hamlet of Ave Maria. This dispute worsened on 10 December when several dwellings were set on fire, and inhabitants of Ave Maria and members of the Melanesian tribe of Saint-Louis were injured by gunfire. The long-dormant problem erupted following a rapid increase in the population of Ave Maria and with the appearance of a gang of idle and violent youths on the Saint-Louis side. On 3 February 2002, young Jean-Marie Goyetta died as a result of his wounds. On 10 June, a thirty-six-year-old Wallisian, Petelo Motuku, was killed by a sniper as he was setting off for work in his car. Paradoxically, this new drama reduced the tension, and the high commissioner then managed to set up the mediation system greatly desired by the various communities. This serious business had few direct effects on Wallis and Futuna, but it accentuated the unease felt by expatriate Wallisians and Futunians in New Caledonia.

Administratively, the recurring debate on the evolution of the statute of 1961 was kept alive by Senator Robert Laufoaulu and the state services. Indeed, the French government’s desire was to give the elected officials a sense of responsibility on all levels, and more particularly to support greater autonomy for the three French political entities located in the South Pacific. The statute problem came up in the context of a debate about the place of the traditional chieftaincy in institutions, and also concerning the choice of competencies to be transferred.

The economy of Wallis and Futuna still depends on direct or indirect transfers from France. In July 2001, the multisector guaranteed minimum wage was raised to FCFP 70,000, which is much higher than in other countries in the region, yet less than that paid in France. In this regard, the president of the territorial parliament noted that there was “a change of mentality. Wallisians are gradually changing their way of life, their eating habits, their dress, and also their way of thinking. There is now a lot of demand on behalf of the population, which is very new” (*Te Fenua Fo'ou*, no. 292).

A third merchant ship now brings freight to Mata-Utu. Operated by the Sofrana company, the one-hundred-six-meter-long *Sofrana Bligh* makes a three-week run starting in New Zealand and calling at Tonga, Samoa, Wallis, and finally Futuna.

The problem of a special interisland ferry service is still unresolved. The chieftaincies of Futuna wanted a financial arrangement based on 9 percent participation for each of the three districts, and 24 percent for the territory, with private shareholders holding 49 percent of the capital. The state imposed an arrangement based on a 51 percent participation of the territory supplemented by 5 percent participation per district.

The Société Industrielle of Wallis and Futuna, the only real processing plant specializing in the manufacture of sheet metal and aluminum joinery, asked for an increase of 20 percent on customs taxes in its sphere of activity.

Tourism remains underdeveloped, although thirty-six sailing ships anchored in the territory in 2001, with

only seventeen flying the French flag. On average, stopovers are five days. In January 2002, reinforcement work and a hundred-meter extension of the runway of Hihifo international airport were completed so that the island could receive A320 airbuses.

There were two noteworthy cultural exhibitions in July 2001. One was devoted to the individuals who were influential during Wallis and Futuna's first forty years as an overseas territory; the other commemorated eighty years of local philately. At the same time, various cultural events emphasized the significant Wallisian and Futunian community of New Caledonia, which sometimes led to sharp reactions from certain Melanesian pro-independence political leaders. On one occasion, sixty-three Futunian dancers and craftsmen went to Noumea and an exhibition catalogue, covering 3,000 years of history, took stock of the prehistoric period in Wallis and Futuna.

On 8 March, the editor in chief of the weekly *Te Fenua Fo'ou* was called to a hearing by the *lavelua* (king), Tomasi Kulimoetoke. As the king refused the editor's right to evoke the follow-up to the Make Pilioko affair, his interpreter declared that “if the newspaper continued to work in this way, the Lavelua would have the newspaper shut down.” The following week, the *puluiuvea* (customary minister of the police force) ordered the equipment belonging to the manager, Michel Bodineau, confiscated or destroyed. Bodineau managed to publish a last edition (no. 326) in Noumea before declaring his company bankrupt. The headline of the last editorial read: “Absolute Monarchy

or French Banana Republic?” In Wallis, 700 copies of the headline were distributed and in New Caledonia, 800 copies.

In April, the Oceania Customs Organization was the first international conference to be hosted by Mata-Utu. Regarding religion, a noteworthy event was the translation of the New Testament (*Ko le Tausifo'ou*) into Futunian.

Groups of affiliated trade unions of France continued to train their members on the other side of the world. The Force Ouvrière trade union sent a training officer for a week in August 2001. In sports, men's cricket (*kilikiti*) is again in fashion in the district of Mua.

Lastly, on the customary level, in September 2001 Soane Patita Suve became Tui Toafa, that is, the new chief of the village of Mala'e. In October, Mikaele Holoia became Utumaka, the chief of one of the halves of Vailala village. In November, Keleto Lakalaka again became Tui Uvea, chief of Te'esi. In January 2002, Petelo Ponoso was established as Eva, the title of the chief of Utufua.

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