New Zealand and the *Mau* in Samoa

**REASSESSING THE CAUSES OF A COLONIAL PROTEST MOVEMENT**

In the history of Samoa in the twentieth century, two events dominate: the *Mau* protest and the early granting of independence – the first in the Pacific – in 1962. Of the two, the first is by far the more dramatic and has received more historiographical attention. The *Mau* protest is widely regarded by people with the slightest knowledge of Samoan history to be a nationalist movement of justifiable protest, occasioned by the insensitivity if not oppression of a colonial power. Indeed, popular perceptions of the character of New Zealand’s role as a colonial authority in the Pacific are defined by beliefs about the *Mau* episode. It overshadows any credit which New Zealand might have claimed for leading the way in decolonization and for showing confidence in small island territories as potential sovereign states. However, neither as a reflection on New Zealand’s colonial policy nor for its duration is the *Mau* of the significance with which it has been credited. Its importance was considerably inflated by contemporary propaganda, which has continued to influence the judgement of historians, and neither its long-term impact nor its direct achievements amounted to very much.

The *Mau* formally began in 1927 after some preliminary grumbling extending back intermittently to 1919. The only bellicose confrontation took place on 28 December 1929, when one New Zealand policeman and several Samoans, including the high-ranking chief, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi, were killed. In March 1930 the leaders surrendered, and agreed to call off the protest. Sporadic activity continued for the next few years, becoming progressively less important. The election of the Labour party to power in New Zealand in 1935 was accompanied by rhetoric about a new deal for Samoa, but no substantive changes of policy or procedure took place. However, *Mau* chiefs did replace non-*Mau* chiefs in government positions in Samoa, and inactive repressive legislation, passed only to deal with the *Mau* in the first place, was repealed. The *Mau*, in short, presented a serious problem to the administration for only about three years in a 47-year period of government, and while it made many functions of government inoperable for those three years, neither life nor property were threatened; nor was the New Zealand régime in Samoa ever threatened with collapse, let alone ejection.

Nevertheless, the *Mau* is important in Samoan history for reasons which have so far been quite overlooked. Notwithstanding the fact that the movement did not have a rational justification, nor even perhaps a clear understanding of its objective (variously stated as being self-government or independence), it did succeed in transcending the long-standing divisiveness of traditional Samoan political behaviour.
Throughout the period of its contact with Europeans, attempts to stabilize Samoan politics had foundered on the same shoal: that Samoan politics was a never-resolved contest between a victorious party and a vanquished one. As in Westminster electoral politics, there was always a strong party (the *malo*), which enjoyed status and power, and a weak party (the *vaivai*), which was humiliated, powerless and resentful. The membership of both groups was fluid, and the *vaivai* conspired constantly to overthrow the *malo*, to become, in their turn, the *malo*. All attempts to establish unitary, stable governments between 1866 and 1899 had come to grief in civil war as the weak party sought to overthrow the strong.¹ Fluid though the political groupings were, the major titles of rank were affiliated with one or other of two sets of orator titles called *Tumua* and *Pule* respectively. The orators were the real power in Samoa: they were the ones who negotiated, exhorted, and made deals; it was they, rather than the holders of the titles of rank, who possessed the intimate knowledge of history and genealogy which allowed them to manipulate claims for titles and who could arrange alliances. Fundamentally, it was the unwillingness of the orator-chiefs to surrender their powers which made the nineteenth-century experiments in government unworkable.

Likewise, the orator groups of *Tumua* and *Pule* were the main obstacles to the consolidation of power by the German colonial régime between 1900 and 1914. Governor Wilhelm Solf recognized that the modernization of Samoa depended on breaking the power of *Tumua* and *Pule*, and similarly, *Tumua* or *Pule* were behind each of the Samoan attempts to throw off German power.² The power of *Tumua* and *Pule* was, however, only suppressed, not broken, by the German régime. Until it could be broken, or sublimated in a form of democratic party politics, the modernization of Samoan politics could never happen. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether New Zealand could have broken or did break the power of the orator groups, the achievement of the *Mau* was to transcend them. Under foreign government almost all chiefs, whether orators or not, became *vaivai* insofar as they were made subordinate. Hence, whatever else it failed to achieve, the *Mau* drew them all together, so that when, after the Second World War, New Zealand placed decolonization on the political agenda, the continuing rivalry of *Tumua* and *Pule* was not there to hijack the process or undermine the viability of post-independence government.

Most attempts to explain the origin of the *Mau* overlook the implications of the *malo–vaivai* division, and the rivalries of the orator-chiefs of *Tumua* and *Pule*. These traditional political categories, however, made protest movements (whether violent uprisings or more muted opposition) against any government virtually inevitable. Samoans did not need to be misgoverned in order to rise in protest; it was only necessary that there be a government, and

whether it was a foreign government or a Samoan government was scarcely material. However, when the *malo* was foreign, the *vaivai* was bound, sooner or later, to include most Samoans. Indeed, examined superficially, this is not very different from the situation to be found wherever a country is under foreign occupation: patriots will consider it their duty to eject the foreign governor, regardless of his policies or merits, and the patriotic movement will include representatives of different classes, factions and interest groups who would ordinarily have nothing in common, and might even be at open enmity. A common enemy engenders a convenient if ephemeral unity. As to what Samoans ‘really’ thought about the character of New Zealand rule, it is impossible to say because Samoan society was strictly aristocratic, even authoritarian. Insofar as ‘Samoan’ opinion is known, it is Samoan chiefly opinion; and when chiefs complained of misrule, it need not signify hardship or oppression where the people at large were concerned. Indeed, it might mean the contrary if chiefly values and status were being called into question. The Samoan chiefs, like most people elsewhere, never preferred foreign rule.\(^3\) While they accepted it and acknowledged it, and at times expressed their appreciation for it, or even their preference for one (potential) foreign ruler over another (actual) one, there was never a time when they would not have preferred to be ruled by themselves. The presence of this feeling is not evidence of misrule, nor is the *Mau* evidence that New Zealand’s actual management of the Samoans was any worse than the alternatives, indigenous or foreign.\(^4\)

The scene is set, therefore, to consider two questions: first, whether Samoans showed a tendency to revolt under colonial government generally, and second, whether they were misgoverned under the New Zealand mandate. When Western Samoa first came under imperial rule, that of Germany in 1900, Samoans might have thought that this was merely the latest of a series of foreign interventions in Samoa’s turbulent politics, although contemporary speeches indicate that they understood that authority had been transferred permanently out of their hands.\(^5\) Attempts to reject German rule were not long in coming. In 1904 tentative claims to greater status and authority for the highest chiefs were made, and in 1905 more assertiveness was shown in breaking two chiefs out of gaol. Settlers claimed that they feared an indigenous uprising. The governor’s response was intended to let the chiefs know that there could be no doubt about who was in charge of Samoa. Three years later a more serious uprising occurred. This

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4 Cf. however, the opinion of the American anthropologist Dr Douglas Oliver, who visited Western Samoa in 1943 as leader of a mission from the Board of Economic Warfare and considered that Western Samoans were the happiest and best administered people in the Pacific and that the government had been ‘markedly successful’. Island Territories (IT) 11 Turnbull File, 5 June 1943, National Archives, Wellington. All subsequent official archival references are to the National Archives.

was the *Mau a Pule*, the intention of which was to replace German rule with the former Samoan government, and in 1909 an armed force advanced on the capital, Apia, from Savai’i. The affair did not finally end until Solf called in warships and had the leaders exiled to the Caroline Islands. Other punishments included fines, imprisonment, land confiscation, the abolition of certain Samoan titles, and the suspension of native Samoan officials. The response was both punitive and exemplary, and Solf’s proclamation at the time warned the Samoans, ‘you will understand that it is my love for you that has made me punish you so lightly’.6 After that, discontent dared not show itself openly, but German rule was to last only another five years, and there is no reason to think that the Samoans would have let matters rest indefinitely.

The neighbouring American territory of the eastern islands of Samoa was only superficially more tractable. Because Tutuila and Manu’a were marginal to Samoan national politics, the régime established by the United States navy in eastern Samoa did not face the same difficulties or challenges as the Germans did in the west. In 1902 signs of protest on Manu’a, which actually arose from an intra-Samoan dispute, were described as a ‘minor rebellion’, but almost 20 years passed before a more serious challenge to foreign authority arose: in April 1920 the chiefs of Tutuila formed a *Mau* and brought the work of government to a standstill. The Americans acted firmly, bringing in a battleship and gaoling 19 chiefs, after which the movement appeared to disband,7 but it recurred at various levels of seriousness for the next decade.8 This all took place when comparisons unfavourable to New Zealand were being made between the administrations of American and Western Samoa.9 Later historians who trace the Western Samoan Mau to feelings of resentment over the contrast between the terrible losses in the 1918 influenza epidemic in Western Samoa10 and the effective quarantine in American Samoa, have overlooked the fact that both régimes faced similar *Mau* during the 1920s. Indeed, the *Mau* in American Samoa predated that in Western Samoa, although in other respects the two movements were remarkably similar.

In explaining the *Mau* in Western Samoa, therefore, a comparison with the two other régimes leads to two alternative hypotheses. Either the protest was independent of the character of foreign rule, or all three régimes engaged in similarly repressive policies. Either way, it does not follow that New Zealand got into difficulties because of the exceptional clumsiness or ineptness of its

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6 Keesing, p.92.
7 Prime Minister of New Zealand to Governor-General, 19 August 1922, IT1 Ex 2/9.
8 Keesing, pp.133-6.
9 Prime Minister to Governor-General, 19 August 1922, IT1 Ex2/9.
officials or policies. And yet that is what has been claimed by most scholars. On the contrary, the New Zealand administration was liberal, its policies progressive, and its officials were sensitive to the needs and prejudices of the Samoans, having due regard to the spirit of the times. The years 1920 to 1926 were years of active and enthusiastic experimentation in which form was given to New Zealand’s undertakings under the League of Nations’ Mandate to promote ‘the well-being and development of the people’.

The modernization programme was initiated by Colonel Robert Tate who had taken over in 1919 from the war-time administrator, the unfortunate Colonel Robert Logan, whose record in Samoa was blighted by the lapse in quarantine which permitted the introduction of the fatal influenza scourge in 1918. While much of Tate’s early activity was concerned with managing the politics of relations with the Samoans, he vigorously pursued policies of reconstruction and development. In 1921 the Medical Department was reorganized and a Division of Public Hygiene established. Nurse training was undertaken and a three-year course for Native Medical Practitioners was begun; meanwhile an international search was undertaken for specialists in tropical medicine. Plans were made for a district nursing scheme modelled on that of New Zealand, with particular attention to maternal and infant health. Hospital attendances increased as Samoan confidence in western medicine rose, and the Samoan population increased by about 6% in the first 18 months after the influenza epidemic.

Tate was as vigorous in education, which was formerly conducted almost entirely by the Christian missions in unco-ordinated efforts. He initiated plans for a national system, appointed a superintendent to inspect the mission schools, and arranged for instruction in teaching methods to be provided for the untrained Samoan teachers. He held an Education Conference of interested parties in December 1920 to make plans and canvass possibilities. This conference gave way to a Board of Education which included two Samoan members nominated by the Fono of Faipule. Continuation classes were set up so that Samoans could learn English, and Europeans could learn Samoan, and as early as 1921 four Samoan boys were selected for


12 Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. It should be noted that New Zealand colonialism was informed by quite different values and objectives from that of most other powers, and indeed was different from that of the nineteenth-century New Zealand propagandists of colonial expansion. New Zealand intentions and policies, on the whole, were perfectly in accord with the ideals embodied in the League of Nations mandates agreement. Samoan labour was not exploited, lands were not alienated and resources were not appropriated. While other powers may have regarded the mandate system as a ‘fig-leaf for annexation’, New Zealand policy and practice always looked forward to a time of Samoan independence. In this respect, New Zealand was a model exponent of the post-World War I ideal of colonial wardship.
scholarships to attend St. Stephen’s College, the Maori boys’ school in Auckland. Young men were also sent to New Zealand to train as surveyors’ assistants for the newly established Lands and Survey Department.

In agriculture the emphasis initially was on the control of weeds and pests, especially the rhinoceros beetle, which was a scourge of coconut production, the commercial staple of Samoans and foreign planters alike. In public works there was much activity taking up the slack of four years’ provisional administration during wartime: residences for civil servants, offices, school and hospital buildings, roads, bridges, workshops, street lighting and water reticulation for Apia, and rubbish collection were undertaken. During 1922 the supply of piped water to Samoan villages began, and in other villages, large concrete tanks for water storage were built. An experimental farm was also mentioned in the 1922 administration report. By 1925 steps were under way to extend hydro-electric power for lighting in Samoan villages. Nor was all this done exclusively with expensive imported labour: Samoans were trained on the job, thus providing a local skills base. Localization also took place in the police force: European numbers were reduced from ten to six, and Samoan numbers increased from 27 to 31.

Nor was the government one of paternalistic provision of wants for a passive native population. Agricultural pest control and increased planting were undertaken by Samoans, who were consulted by the government about the policies and how they might be implemented. Medical services were funded by a special medical tax of £1 per head for males 17 years and over on request of the Samoans, in preference to fees for services provided. The 1923 report averred that the Samoans were ‘responding gradually but surely to the gospel of self-help, which is being instilled into them by all Government officials’. To further encourage the sense that Samoans controlled their immediate destinies, and that they were responsible for their own well-being, the administration under Major General George Richardson, Tate’s successor, introduced a new system of local government. Traditional village government had scarcely been modified in German times, and had been left untouched by Tate. Richardson perceived that new developments required a new approach to local government: sanitation, road maintenance, the better education of children, land allocation and plantation development, to say nothing of a particular interest of his own, the remodelling of villages, required a system of government more analogous to European local government. To this end he established district councils, composed of chiefs nominated by the constituent villages, the districts being based on traditional Samoan political clusters. Part of the rationale was the education it would provide in modern political management, with the need for record keeping, financial accountability and co-ordinated practices.

13 New Zealand, Mandated Territory of Western Samoa, First Report of the Government of the Dominion of New Zealand on the Administration . . . for the period 1st May 1920 to 31 March 1921, Wellington, 1921. Subsequent details are from later reports for the relevant years.
14 Report . . . 1924, p.4.
Education was a particular concern of General Richardson, a largely self-educated man who had risen from the ranks in the British army to high office. For him, education was at the heart of any policy of native development. In his 1924 report, he wrote:

I consider that Samoa's most urgent needs are:-
1. The education of the people in the laws of health and sanitation, so that the race may be healthy and multiply.
2. To educate them in improved methods of cultivation and to make them realize that their future lies in developing their lands, and so enhance their prosperity and the economic advancement of Samoa.
3. To train the younger generation in such arts, crafts, and vocations as will enable them to further their own development with less dependence upon European assistance than they are now compelled to receive.

Education needed to be harmonized with the future needs of the people, which meant a vernacular curriculum, not a transplanted foreign one. Foreign study tours were another of Richardson's enthusiasms. Towards the end of 1924 he arranged for a party of chiefs (all of whom were members of the Fono of Faipule, a national advisory body) to visit New Zealand to study a modern society at first hand, and particularly to examine the work of local government. At the same time, another group visited Tonga to study land tenure with a view to obtaining their support for individualized land-tenure, similar to that which had prevailed in Tonga for the previous 40 years.

All authorities agree that Richardson was devoted to the idea of Samoan progress. He was full of energy, ideas and enthusiasm. He deserves to be remembered as one of the more progressive and enlightened colonial administrators in the Pacific in the first half of the twentieth century. Instead, because of the aftermath, he is blamed for his enthusiasm and optimism which are made into faults which drove the Samoans into revolt. The inconsistency of this position is evident in the strange judgement of Margery Perham, later the leading authority on African colonial administration and biographer of Lord Lugard. In 1929 Perham was the holder of a travelling fellowship whereby she visited Samoa and New Zealand in the course of a world tour. She commended New Zealand's ideals and enthusiasm, but was disdainful of the achievement of what was only a few years, and condemned the results of Richardson's education policy in the same terms as Richardson himself had condemned education which did not take account of Samoa's needs. Of Richardson himself she wrote, after a three-hour interview, that his virtues as well as his faults caused the Mau:

He is charming and persuasive, full of vitality which he cannot hold in, ambitious, vain, overbearing, and, fundamentally, a promoted British NCO. Watching him I can imagine how he flung himself into his work, studied the language, loved the Samoans,

15 Report... 1924, pp.6, 12.
stimulated them, speechified, paraded, reformed, and generally keyed everything up. I can see how difficult it was to oppose or criticize him. I found myself that he made it almost impossible to dissent. . . . There was only one answer to make to him. ‘Yes, you are splendid, keen, clever, vigorous; you did everything you could for Samoa. The only fault is that you had no knowledge of native administration, of Samoan traditions and character, nor had those who had appointed you.’

Nor, it might be added, did Margery Perham have any knowledge of those things at that time, and her criticism of Richardson is fundamentally a criticism of his enthusiasm mixed with her own social snobbery. She was hardly in a position to say what Richardson knew of native administration and Samoan character, but took her cue from the knowledge that Richardson was recalled from Samoa having lost the confidence of his government. Her own ideas of ‘native administration’ at that time were mainly a priori and conventional, derived from ship-board conversations with a pre-service appointee to Fiji, and the commandant of American Samoa. ‘We went on to ask, “Ought these Polynesian people to be preserved?” It is clear that they cannot stand what we call development (or progress?) or only when it is slowed down to a pace that to us is a standstill. Apparently strong and beautiful, they wither away before Western pressures.’

Richardson had been convinced that the Samoans could indeed ‘stand development’, but the romantic notion that they could not was at the heart of a long-standing and continuing debate about development philosophy. The idea that Polynesians simply ‘wither away’ was already anachronistic. As to the ideal pace of development, the fact was that no one knew — or knows — what the ideal rate of progress in such cases should be. In New Zealand, under the influence of Young Maori Party politicians, tāiao (‘go slowly’) was the watchword of policy. The rate of change for Maori was deliberately held back and this policy was extended to the Cook Islands as well, and Sir Apirana Ngata, the long-serving Minister for Native Affairs (with responsibility also for the Cook Islands), advocated it for the Samoans. Richardson’s predecessor, Tate, had urged the Samoan chiefs to ‘Remember me as the man who said “Go slow”’. Yet Tate had been, like Richardson, a progressive who accelerated the pace of material change and incorporated Samoan chiefs into the process of government, who established the precedent adopted by Richardson, of consulting the Fono of Faipule on all matters to do with the Samoans. Later historians, critical of New Zealand’s colonial episode, emphasized the unwisdom of making political advancement wait on the results of economic progress. Richardson in particular is the subject of criticism from these historians yet as a reformer he was close to the spirit of

17 Perham, p.125.
18 ibid, p.74.
20 Tate’s speech to Fono of Faipule, 16 March 1923, IT1 Ex2/9.
21 Davidson, pp. 233, 344. Even Boyd (pp.200–1) was critical of the ‘soldier-administrators’ on these grounds.
the progressive 1950s: he, and Tate before him, strove to give Samoans political experience, and to teach them the methods of modern, democratic government and provide the institutions of local government, the absence of which in the 1950s particularly attracted criticism from J.W. Davidson, who was both adviser on and historian of decolonization.22

The historians cannot have it both ways. They cannot condemn Richardson’s policies as provoking the Mau, and simultaneously commend the adoption 30 years later of policies which Richardson had initiated, just because those policies were part of a decolonization programme. The conventional way out of this contradiction is to say that Richardson’s style was at fault: that he was tactless, that he would not wait for the leisureed pace of Samoan decision making, that he was too domineering. And yet Richardson was personally popular, his decisiveness respected;23 moreover, comparison with American and German Samoa suggests that difficulties with the Samoans were inevitable. Even without Richardson’s personal style (supposing it to have been provocative), there would have been a Mau as there was under the other two régimes.24 There were two causes for this: first, the nature of traditional Samoan politics, and second, the influence of the settlers.

In Western Samoa, traditional politics had been suppressed by the Germans, not extinguished. The two fautua were mere figure-heads to satisfy the need for status of superior chiefs who had been deprived of power; the Fono of Faipule was a nominal body which met twice a year for no concrete purpose. The Fono of Faipule was originally established under the constitution of 1873 as the Lower House of a bicameral legislature, the other house (the Taimua) being a house of the highest chiefs. When the German régime took over in 1900, the Taimua and Fono of Faipule were retained, but in an unpaid, advisory capacity. The former kingship was retained under a new title (Ali‘i Sili or High Chief) and the kingly title (Tupu Sili) was transferred to the Kaiser. After the disturbances of 1905 Solf abolished both houses, but subsequently re-created the Fono of Faipule as a national advisory body, whose members were paid to attend two meetings a year. Its members were chiefs who were appointed by the governor, to hold office at his pleasure. In 1912 Solf took advantage of the death of the Ali‘i Sili to abolish the office, and to create a new position for the two leading contenders, the fautua who were nominally to be personal advisers to the governor. When German rule ended two years later, it left a legacy for New Zealand (in the words of the anthropologist Felix Keesing) of ‘frustrated ambition,

22 Davidson, p.344.
24 How much Samoan opinion was really critical of Richardson, and how much criticisms depended on political context may be judged from the words of Fonoti, a Samoan chief and faipule. When Fonoti was urging certain initiatives on a later administrator, A. C. Turnbull, in 1944, he reassured him saying, ‘Don’t worry about what happened to General Richardson. Times are different now. The Samoans were ignorant then. Now we of the fono approach you for help. We made mistakes in the past but now we know better.’ Minutes, 22 September 1944, ITI Ex89/10.
undercurrents of intrigue, a considerable dislocation of political and ceremonial life, and mellowing memories of good old days when chiefs . . . were all-powerful'.

When New Zealanders arrived during the Great War with their democratic heritage and conviction of ‘Samoa for the Samoans’, they immediately set about giving the Samoans political experience. They lit a fuse by not recognizing that Samoans were already politically experienced; they therefore failed to recognize that German policy had been to extinguish a political tradition which had hitherto made Samoa ungovernable. Instead, the New Zealanders assumed that Samoans were to be prepared for future self-government, and immediately began the process of tutelage, even before the end of the war. In other words, far from introducing the idea of politics to the Samoans, as they thought they were doing, they removed the lid which Solf had striven, with much effort, to hold down. Samoans, feeling the pressure ease, immediately took advantage of the revived opportunities to resume their former practices and began to destabilise the régime.

It could hardly be expected that New Zealand officials would have the background knowledge which the Germans had accumulated during their contest for power with the Samoan chiefs. Logan treated the fauuta and the Fono of Faipule as genuine advisory bodies, whereas Solf had intended them merely to deflect Samoan ambitions and to be a means of managing the Samoans. Logan treated both groups with respect, and as vacancies occurred in the fono he accepted nominations by the faipules themselves without interfering, though he regarded it as unsatisfactory. All the same, the fono had no real power, but Logan evidently sought its advice, and formed the impression that Samoans were content with New Zealand rule, until the influenza epidemic which brought about a complete change of attitude.

With the re-establishment of civil rule under Tate, the Fono of Faipule began to manoeuvre for greater status and power. There were two issues involved: one was the natural desire of chiefs to assume more power and recognition than they had under the present régime, and the second was the susceptibility of the faipule individually to information fed them by white settlers which was not always friendly to the government. Tate tried to fend off these dangers first by resuming the authority, which lapsed under Logan, of nominating new members himself, and second by taking the fono into his confidence. In December 1921 he began meeting with the fono rather than communicating with it formally, as had been the former custom, and found the faipule intelligent and interested in government, and capable of being useful.

25 Keesing, p.94.
27 Report by Logan, 8 July 1919, IT1 Ex1/10.
28 Ibid. Tate reported on 8 March 1919 that the Samoans esteemed Logan highly, Army Department (AD) 35 56/58/77.
29 Tate to Captain Waldo Evans, 22 February 1921, IT1 Ex2/9.
30 Tate, Confidential Report, 10 April 1922, IT1 Ex2/11.
to him. By 1922 he was advocating a clarification and formalization of their role, and he consulted it regularly on matters of importance. This recognition of status changed the tone of the meetings of the fono from truculent to constructive and appreciative.\(^\text{31}\)

By the time he left Samoa at the beginning of 1923, Tate was able to report that, while reserving the legislative powers to himself, he worked through ordinances relating to Samoan affairs in detail with the fono, and appreciated the advice and information they gave him. He also saw the potential of the fono as a future parliament, and treated it as one to give the members experience. At the same time, he realized the implicit Samoan power struggle. One factor in the faipules’ co-operation with him was their knowledge that their status depended on his treatment of them. The continued suppression of Tumua and Pule was the guarantee of their own importance, and it made them supporters of the government, albeit susceptible to anti-government propaganda from settlers. On the other hand, he regarded the fautua as quite useless and believed that their position should be allowed to lapse on the deaths of the present incumbents. At all events, Tate concluded that the fono had been developed into ‘an institution of value’.\(^\text{32}\)

Richardson continued the practice of treating the fono as a potential parliament. He increased the amount of business that he gave it, extended its meetings and made them more frequent, and attached state ceremonial to meetings. He had members follow European procedures of meetings rather than the relaxed and discursive Samoan style which so frequently failed to reach conclusions. He made fono meetings occasions to visit development projects, and had them addressed by senior officials on government plans and activities. By the concern that he showed for their opinions he gave them quasi-legislative powers and inferred that they appreciated their increased importance. In filling vacancies among the faipule, Richardson modified the earlier approach still further, taking more account of Samoan tradition and opinion. He invited the chiefs of a district to nominate a replacement, or if they could not agree, to submit two or three names. As a result, Richardson said, he never had to select a faipule himself.\(^\text{33}\)

Thus, there was consistent practice over a decade of both military and civil rule of encouraging Samoans in political procedures and encouraging them to think that New Zealand would defer to them. So much influence did the faipule have in Samoan affairs, that in 1923 they declined the suggestion made by Tate the previous year that they might nominate representatives of their own to the Legislative Council. That would have been a step forward in

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\(^{\text{31}}\) For example, Native Department Report for 1921, IT1 Ex2/9; Confidential Report, 10 February 1922, Confidential Report, 4 August 1922, IT1 Ex2/11.

\(^{\text{32}}\) The quotation is from Tate to Minister of External Affairs, 28 March 1923, IT1 Ex2/9. The evidence for this paragraph generally pervades the regular reports on meetings of the fono, IT1 Ex88/3, and the Administrator’s Confidential Quarterly Reports, IT1 Ex2/11. See in particular Tate’s Report of 17 January 1923, IT1 Ex88/3.

\(^{\text{33}}\) Richardson’s relationship with the fono and details of his dealings with it are given in his regular reports, IT1 Ex88/3.
conventional constitutional terms, but would have reduced the direct influence of the *faipule* in matters of native policy.  

It is evident therefore that all matters relating to Native Affairs under the first three New Zealand administrators had the approval, not to say collaboration, of a body of Samoan chiefs. Nor can it be said that these chiefs were not representative because they came from all over Samoa and most had been nominated either by other members of the *fono* or (under Richardson) by chiefs of the district that they represented. It would not have been possible to find a more representative group of influential Samoans for the purpose at the time. Further than that, in no other Pacific colonial territory, save Fiji, could it be said that more effort was taken to consult native opinion and train indigenous leaders in the principles and practices of modern government. It is untenable therefore to argue that the *Mau* was the result of bad policies or oppression unless it is also argued that Samoa’s leading chiefs shared responsibility for them. What these policies did not do, however, was satisfy the ambitions of Samoan chiefs for real and immediate power (especially of chiefs who were not members of the *fono*), nor could they deal with dissent from the settler community. Since, under the Germans, the *fono* had had no power, and since it was an institution which had no traditional precedent, it is unlikely that vacancies filled under the consultative processes of Logan, Tate and Richardson were occupied by chiefs of much importance. The most exalted chiefs would almost certainly have regarded the position as somewhat demeaning, or at least beneath them, so when the status and influence of the *fono* began to rise in the early 1920s, it is inevitable that they should have been resentful and felt that the administration was trying to eclipse their traditional status.

A basis can therefore be found in traditional political assumptions for senior Samoan chiefs to mount a protest against the government. Long-resident settlers also had grievances, some of which were peculiar to the present régime and others extending back into German times. It was unfortunate for the government that these two groups, chiefs and settlers, should have been able to make common cause. For each – settlers and frustrated chiefs – the path to success was by collaboration with the other in the exploitation of real or fabrication of imagined grievances. Successive administrators warned repeatedly of the dangers posed by the settler community to good and stable government, and repeatedly attributed Samoan unrest to settler agitation. Solf, who had his own troubles with discontented settlers, believed that white intriguers were implicated in the protest movements of 1904-5 and 1908-9. Logan’s end-of-term report drew attention to the conflict of interest between the indigenous and settler populations, and advised that if it were intended to govern Samoa primarily

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34 Davidson, p.108. It had been Tate’s suggestion that Samoan representation on the Legislative Council should be by nomination of the *Fono of Faipule*. Report, 10 May 1922, IT1 Ex88/3.

35 Keesing, pp.87, 92.
in the interests of the former (as he advocated), special precautions would be needed.\textsuperscript{36}

Tate’s experience confirmed Logan’s advice. Whenever Samoans spoke to him of grievances, he found on examination that they stemmed from misinformation derived from European sources. Samoan hostility to the Samoa Act was a case in point. The petition of 1919 demanding transfer to American rule was ostensibly inspired by the influenza epidemic, but that was a convenient cover for the real reason, which had to do with the Toea’ina Club, a politico-commercial enterprise which was seeking American capital. Tate saw that behind this petition lay the private interests of the trader, Harry Moors, and a leading chief, Toleafoa, and manipulation of Samoan opinion by European malcontents.\textsuperscript{37} The petition of 1921, which asked for the transfer of Western Samoa from New Zealand to Great Britain, was signed by 27 of the 34 faipule but transparently showed the hand of European draughtsmanship;\textsuperscript{38} even the settler newspaper, the \textit{Samoa Times}, took the view that it was inspired by whites. The collaboration, despite the conflict of settler–native interests, was easily explained by Tate: ‘It is generally considered now that the natives are considered an important political factor and not a merely negligible quantity and malcontents endeavour to achieve their desires through them.’ Nor was this an isolated instance. Of agitation by ‘whites’ and ‘half-castes’ Tate wrote ‘This has always delayed progress in securing the confidence of the natives and it is probable that the very undesirable course of encouraging a breach between the natives and the white residents must be undertaken. We have as consistently avoided setting brown against white as certain white and half-caste residents have maligned us to the natives . . . here is a sufficiency of grounds for trouble among the natives themselves without white fomentation, but white fomentation is very effective.’\textsuperscript{39} To the faipule themselves, Tate was explicit and emphatic that settler interests and indigenous interests were antithetical, and that settler advice was self-interested.\textsuperscript{40}

Richardson was hardly less emphatic about the sinister role of the settlers in pitting the Samoans against the government, as in his rebuttal of Citizens’ Committee documents, circulated in 1926.\textsuperscript{41} Matters were brought to a head by the Citizens’ Committee, which produced two reports, one called ‘European Report’ and the other ‘Samoan Report’, both criticizing the administration generally, and its native policy in particular. Both are clearly written by authors whose mother tongue was English. Both contained errors

\textsuperscript{36} Report by Logan, 8 July 1919, IT1 Ex1/10.
\textsuperscript{37} Report by Tate, 8 March 1919, AD35 56/58/77.
\textsuperscript{38} In particular, that of a Mr Rae. See Gray to Government House, 5 September 1921, IT1 Ex88/3.
\textsuperscript{39} Tate, Confidential Report, 10 February 1922, IT1 Ex2/11. The \textit{Mau} in American Samoa was similarly provoked by the agitation of white malcontents. See Tate to Captain Waldo Evans, 22 February 1921, IT1 Ex 2/9 and Keesing, pp.133-9.
\textsuperscript{40} Text of speech to the \textit{Fono} of \textit{Faipule}, April 1922, IT1 Ex88/3.
\textsuperscript{41} Richardson to Minister of External Affairs, 22 December 1926. See also Report by Acting Secretary, 13 December 1926, IT1 Ex88/3.
which were easily rebutted by Richardson, but the European report was exceptional for its effrontery in claiming that ‘Settlers who have made their homes in these islands must find it their sacred duty to at least protest against these injustices to the Samoan natives, whose welfare and advancement are identical with their own best interests as well as to their ideas of democratic government.’

This unique display of altruism by the settler community was of recent development, and suggests a conspiracy between certain settlers and chiefs to wrest control of Native Affairs from the government, as Tate had warned. Most historians of modern Samoa have been reluctant to endorse the ‘white conspiracy’ theory of Tate and Richardson – and generally side-step it, or are equivocal. Malama Meleisea dismisses it and claims support from his predecessors, but acknowledges a coalition of Samoans and local Europeans from 1926. J.W. Davidson side-steps the issue. Albert Wendt, a Samoan, makes quite explicit the original European leadership of the protest movement, and Eteuati, another Samoan, sees clear European influence in the 1921 petition from the Fono of Faipule and notes that Tate detached the fono from European influence. Subsequently Eteuati rejects Richardson’s opinion of ‘white conspiracy rather than genuine grievances’, suggesting that Richardson underrated popular discontent. But Eteuati subsequently says that that was mainly confined to Apia, and Apia was precisely the place where settlers could influence Samoan opinion. Mary Boyd acknowledges the initial European leadership and draws attention to the Samoan leaders being dismissed civil servants. H.J. Hiery alone dismisses the conspiracy theory out of hand on the flimsy grounds that it denies the Samoans their full stature as human beings.

Yet, as most of these authorities acknowledge, the hands of the discontented, alienated settler community were everywhere to be seen: in the ideas incorporated in and the drafting of the 1921 petition (which the high chief and faatua Malietoa wanted withdrawn but was re-presented at the instigation of the wealthy, mixed-race merchant, O.F. Nelson), and its coincidence with a settler petition complaining about levels of taxation and spending; in the 1922 Citizens’ Committee (chaired by Nelson) with its grievances about labour shortages, prohibition and government finances, and in the 1926 Citizens’ Committees. The flaring of Samoan discontent coincided with the European expression of peculiarly settler grievances, while the 1926 affair – which triggered the Mau – came when (as Wendt says) the
settlers were finally alienated by the failure of negotiations over the proposed municipality of Apia.

What is not explained is why Samoans, whose interests were antithetical to those of the settlers, should have joined them, especially as it had not been long before that when the Samoans were protesting against the settlers. In 1920 they organized a mass boycott of European traders because of discontent with the growing post-war slump. Copra prices were falling steadily after the war-time boom, while the costs of imports continued to rise. Copra production by Samoan growers declined as a protest at the falling prices and perceived profiteering by the traders. The boycott was so serious as to alarm Tate for the future of government revenues, which were derived mainly from taxes on imports and exports. He therefore instituted an inquiry to be conducted by the Chief Judge, the Collector of Customs, a representative of the Chamber of Commerce and a Samoan chief. He subsequently established a Board of Trade (whose members included the chief Toelupe, a prominent faipule), which was empowered to operate as a produce marketing authority. The Board offered the Samoans a guaranteed price and a profit-sharing arrangement for cocoa, with the result that prices rose so significantly that the Board did not actually have to buy any. It also proposed a copra price stabilization scheme with the result that the three major copra buyers, who had colluded to depress prices further, held prices up. At the same time, Tate mentioned that he expected future trouble from the traders over his attempts to ensure fair prices for the Samoans. Tate also attempted to facilitate the export of bananas to New Zealand, and had trial shipments of limes and peanuts sent also, all in an attempt to promote Samoan prosperity and to render them in some measure independent of price fixing by the local merchants.

Thus, what emerges from an examination of New Zealand’s administration of Western Samoa in the years leading up to the Mau is not evidence of misgovernment, nor of provocation of the Samoan population, nor of popular Samoan grievances: the aggrieved population was the mercantile and planting population of immigrants. They were antagonized by wartime labour shortages and they remained desperately short of labour in the immediate post-war years; like the Samoans themselves, they felt the pinch of the rapid drop in commodity prices. Then they were faced with a colonial administrator who was prepared to intervene in the market to force up the prices they had to pay for Samoan produce. Notwithstanding other attempts by successive administrators, and especially by Richardson, to promote their comfort and prosperity, they resented the pro-native policies of first Logan, then Tate, and finally Richardson, and like all colonial settler societies, considered that they knew best what was good for themselves, the Samoans and the commercial progress of the territory, and wanted more influence in the

50 Tate, Report on Samoan affairs, 7 January 1921, IT1 Ex2/9.
51 Tate, Confidential Quarterly Report for 1 July 1922 to 30 September 1922, IT1 Ex2/11.
52 Report...1922, p.22.
53 Eteuati, pp.51, 63.
shaping of all policies than any of the administrators or the New Zealand government was prepared to allow them. They particularly wanted at least a share in shaping policy on levels of taxation and government spending, and were contemptuous of the ignorance of local conditions possessed by many of the New Zealand officials. All three administrators, however, were adamant that settler and indigenous interests were antithetical, and that the policy areas in which the settlers were most interested were precisely the ones from which their influence should be excluded. Petty though it seems, the policy which seemed to excite the most animosity was the prohibition on liquor, which was implemented in May 1920. Both in private correspondence to his American counterpart and in official reports, Tate nominated this as the chief cause of settler antagonism. Perhaps as an issue it was more important for its symbolism than its actual effect, because more than anything else it drove home the message that New Zealand policy in Samoa would give priority to Samoan interests. Liquor, in short, was banned for everyone because Article III of the League of Nations’ Mandate prohibited liquor for native peoples. The New Zealand administration took the view that it could not be kept from the Samoans if it were readily available in the settler community.

The claim by the settlers to be able to speak for the Samoans, and therefore to have an input into native policy, while disingenuous, had a plausible basis because among the leading settlers were several who had spent many years in Samoa. Some were married to Samoan women and had close links with Samoan chiefs, and one of them in particular was the son of such a union. He was O.F. Nelson, son of a Swedish trader and a high-ranking Samoan woman. He was the most astute trader in Samoa, and his intelligence and hard work had brought him great wealth by which he supported an ostentatious way of life, and which fed his aspirations to power and recognition among the settler community. He also held the Samoan title of Taisi. Taisi was not a leading title when it was bestowed on Nelson, but his later achievements elevated its status more than it elevated his. At all events, it gave him a claim to speak for the Samoans vis-à-vis the administration, and he had been recommended by Logan for membership of the administrator’s advisory council (later to become the Legislative Council). Nelson, nevertheless, thought and acted like a merchant, and the Samoans considered him to be a merchant in the sa, or boycott, of 1920-21, in which his enterprises suffered along with the others. As the largest trader in Samoa, his firm was also one of the copra buyers targeted by Tate’s anti-price-fixing measures.

54 Tate to Evans, 22 February 1921, and Memorandum to Governor General, 16 June 1921, IT1 Ex2/9.
55 Prohibition had, however, been proposed at least as early as 1919, and was implemented before the conclusion of the mandate agreement. See for example the draft report of the Governor General for 1919, in which he noted that Tate recommended prohibition though personally opposed to it, IT1 Ex1/11. The ban on alcohol was incorporated in the Samoa Constitution Order of 1920.
56 Davidson, p.115n.
57 Report by Logan, 8 July 1919, IT1 Ex1/10.
If certain of the settlers could claim to speak for the Samoans, however, they were also in a position to conspire with them, and indeed, many of the chiefs had a greater community of interest with the traders than they had with the mass of their people with whom the administration sympathized. The high chief Afamasaga Toaleafoa Lagolago, for example, was one such, and after the petition of 1922 Tate observed that he was able to recognize that he had been used by the settlers. It was Afamasaga, however, who in being stripped of his title by Richardson, became a rallying cause for later protests. He was stripped of his title as punishment for breaching the prohibition order by illegally importing from American Samoa an ‘infamous liquor’ called ‘All-in-One’, which he was selling to Samoan customers. Richardson described him disparagingly in a report to Wellington: ‘Afamasaga is a High Chief who wears trousers, speaks English well and trades as a merchant in Apia. I imposed an additional penalty upon him under the Samoan Offences Ordinance and deprived him of his titles and sent him to his native village where he has never lived before but where he can wear a lavalava and get time to reflect on the seriousness of his offence.’ Three years later Afamasaga still had not been restored to his title. It was, Richardson said, not a matter for himself as administrator, but for the family which ‘owned’ the title and did not want to restore it to him.

However, it was not such questions of law enforcement that caused the Mau. It was fundamentally a matter of leadership. Petty grievances, some overlapping interests and a common object of resentment enabled the leading merchants to co-opt leaders among the Samoans to engineer a protest movement of which the prime instigators soon lost control. In particular, there was Nelson, who was both merchant and Samoan chief, and active in the Citizens’ Committee, and better placed than anyone to forge an unlikely alliance. Other chiefs were present at the Citizens’ Committee meetings at which decisions were taken to address grievances to William Nosworthy, the New Zealand Minister for External Affairs. It was Nelson in particular, friend of the administrator Richardson, and member of his Legislative Council, who went behind his back and obtained an interview in Wellington with the Prime Minister. It was Nelson who led the Mau and kept it going when he had committed himself too far to back down, and it was his wealth that financed the Mau newspaper and the adverse publicity in New Zealand and abroad. Nelson, the man of wealth, enormous ambition and commensurate ability, with a foot in both European and Samoan society, who more than anyone else felt the subordination of Samoans to a foreign state.

58 Wendt goes so far as to say that the Europeans who later led the Mau led the European community, naming O.F. Nelson, A.G. Smyth, E. Gurr, A. Williams, G.E. Westbrook and S. Meredith. The character or reputation of these men may be inferred from Logan’s recommending only Nelson to be a member of the Administrator’s advisory council, and explicitly warning against Westbrook. Report by Logan, 8 July 1919, IT1 Ex1/10.

59 Richardson, Interim Report, 13 February 1924, IT1 Ex88/3.

60 Richardson to Minister for External Affairs, 22 December 1926, IT1 Ex88/3. Usurpation of titles by other family members is confirmed by C.G.A. McKay, Samoana. A Personal Story of the Samoan Islands, Wellington, 1968, p.55.
Nelson, foremost among Samoans, understood the idea of nationalism, and was probably the only passionate Samoan nationalist in the Western sense, but even that sentiment was probably subordinate to his own personal ambitions and frustrations. He had been involved in every move against the government since 1910, and his speeches in 1926 made it clear that his frustrations were political.

Explaining why Samoans who had no serious grievances should have followed Nelson’s lead to the edge of rebellion and sedition is not difficult. Nelson was eloquent and he was a chief, and he was known to understand the world of papalagi. A sense of grievance was easily nurtured among the chiefs who had been displaced by the colonial government and whose jurisdiction over their people was now circumscribed by law, and among those who had been dismissed from their employment in government service. Then there was the fact that some chiefs (the members of the Fono of Faipule) had the status and privilege of being identified with the government, with the new malo, while all other chiefs became ipso facto vaivai. Popular support was hardly necessary given the control that Samoan chiefs customarily held over their people. But when that authoritarianism is added to the call ‘Samoa for the Samoans’ (ironically the catch-phrase of Richardson himself) and combined with the novelty and excitement of defiance with organized protest marches, a distinctive uniform and the absence of danger from a government which was throughout conciliatory and mild, the phenomenon of near unanimous support for the Mau until 1930 is easily accounted for.

Support based on such flimsy grounds could not stand either hardship or protracted sacrifice, and once these were demanded, the movement rapidly fell away. In 1930, Mau men fled to the forested highlands when confronted by the belated sternness of the government in the wake of the ‘Black Saturday’ shootings of 28 December 1929. But they were induced to surrender after only three months, after which the spirit went out of the movement. Later pressure from Nelson and his family were to no avail; support was thin and grudging. While Nelson was in exile in New Zealand at this time, he boasted to Labour party leader Harry Holland that the Mau had gone bush and would never surrender. But within a few months it collapsed. By May 1930, Nelson’s wife was writing to him that his own staff did not support him, and ‘your so-called friends . . . stand back’, taking his bread and

61 Boyd, pp.146-7.
62 Eteuati, p.92.
63 ‘Tate, Confidential Quarterly Report for 1 January 1922 to 31 March 1922, IT1 Ex2/11 on the differences between the two faautua, Malietoa and Tuimalaeali’ifano, a dispute which inflamed feeling between their respective districts. Tate alluded to this or a similar flare-up in his third quarterly report of 1922. An attempt had also been made in 1921 to revive Tumua and Pule, a direct challenge to the standing of the faipule. In 1930 the Secretary of Native Affairs reported on the plight of Samoans (including chiefs) who opposed the Mau but were intimidated and harried and called traitors by the Mau. Report by Lewis, 6 January 1930, IT1 Ex1/17/8. See also Boyd, pp.157-8.
64 Davidson, p.112.
65 Nelson to Holland, 10 January 1930, Nelson Papers, Pacific Manuscript Bureau microfilm 712.
butter, but doing nothing for the cause,\textsuperscript{66} while the \textit{Mau} lawyer, Thomas Slipper, ran up costs without consulting the \textit{Mau} women whom he expected to pay his bills.

Nelson knew that the \textit{Mau} did not have a solid base in popular grievances, and that without him it was nothing. His letters to his wife were far less optimistic than his bombastic correspondence with Holland, acknowledging the smallness of their numbers and their disunity.\textsuperscript{67} His official complaints about New Zealand oppression and aggression contrast revealingly with his acknowledgements of New Zealand mildness in his private letters to his wife in Samoa. His urging her to rouse the Women's \textit{Mau}, with the words 'they [the Women's \textit{Mau}] can do things in Samoa which will not be tolerated in any other part of the world',\textsuperscript{68} was a compliment to the New Zealand régime and an admission of the dishonesty of his own propaganda. It was an acknowledgement that the movement had little in the way of popular support or moral principle to legitimate it.

The Samoan people paid a high price for the defiance of a handful of their more privileged chiefs when they boycotted schools, health clinics and agricultural pest control. Their sacrifices cost them dearly in the long term and gained them nothing, and not because of the severity of the New Zealand response, which was mild almost to a fault and certainly lacked the promptness of both German and American responses to dissent. From beginning to end the \textit{Mau} was a protest not against New Zealand oppression, as it has been represented, but against New Zealand mildness and liberalism, which signalled to self-interested settlers and chiefs that it could be safely and easily defied. As a \textit{malo}, the New Zealand administration practically invited a \textit{vaivai} resurgence.

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\textsuperscript{66} Mrs Rosabel Nelson to Nelson, 27 May 1930, Nelson Papers, ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Nelson to Rosabel Nelson, 27 May, 7 August 1930, Nelson Papers, ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Nelson to Rosabel Nelson, 5 September 1930, cf Nelson to Holland, 22 July, 4 August and 1 November 1932, Nelson Papers, ibid.