In November 2006 something incredible happened in Tonga—a country noted for its calm—a demonstration degenerated into a terrible riot which caused eight fatalities and destroyed 80 percent of the Central District of the capital city Nuku‘alofa. Such violence had never erupted in the Kingdom since the 19th century civil wars. What comes directly to mind as a trigger event is the civil servants’ strike in 2005. It was only the second strike in Tonga—the first was the nurses’ strike in 1979-80—and this time it was a real turning point in the life of the kingdom, socially, economically and politically speaking. This 2005 strike was highly significant because it was a lengthy strike with thousands of participants, it found strong support among the population, and the upshot was a victory including significant wage increases and the promise of a constitutional reform. That strike was “the writing on the wall” for the 2006 events, which does not mean that it was not preceded by particularly interesting events. The strike and the riot did not come out of the blue. I present here an analysis of these events up to the day of the riot; I will not attempt to analyse its aftermath. In my analysis I will speak especially of the role played by the middle class. Actually in 1989 I wrote an article trying to show the birth of middle classes in Tonga. In 2003, i.e., 13 years later, Kerry James (2003) published a paper with an abstract beginning with my name, claiming that I was completely wrong and that there were no middle classes in Tonga but rather an educated elite. This is why I have first to return briefly to my 1989 thesis. Thereafter I will discuss the birth of middle classes in Tonga and then continue with an analysis of the social movement. In the final section I will discuss this evolution to see if it confirms my analysis about the role played by the middle class and whether I should take into account other factors to correctly analyse these events.

A THEORY ON MIDDLE CLASSES

Every social scientist, whether they are called traditional, new or salaried, knows how delicate the question of the middle classes is. My late friend Dominique Monjardet and I have tried to produce a theory about the salaried middle classes (Monjardet and Benguigui 1982, 1984, 1985). As a basis for our argument we submitted that the Western societies are moved by the relationship between classes as well as the relationship between the State and the civil society. These two relationships are inextricably interwoven,
but they can be distinguished on a conceptual level. The first order—that of production and exchange—is polarised in Western countries by the opposition of capital and labour. The second order—that of the relationship between the State and civil society—is of the social relationship of the management of the “social” (political, ideological and symbolic) and that of the law. We asserted that these orders, these axes, intersect in a zone where the middle classes are found. That zone is the site of the apparatus of which the middle classes (and it is precisely what defines them) are the agents of management. The apparatus is the means of managing the class relationship, on the one hand, and the relationships between the State and civil society, on the other hand. It is the level of implementation of a policy (recognising that an apparatus does not always have precise and defined limits). For example, on the side of class relationships, in a company there is a capitalist economic intention at the top and we find interposed before the workers a social layer of managers in charge of the apparatus for the implementation of that economic intention. On the side of the relationship between the State and the civil society, we can find, for example, an apparatus for education and there are teachers in charge of that apparatus for the implementation of the State policy for education. As another example, there is an apparatus for Justice and there are judges and lawyers who are in charge of the implementation of the State policy for Justice in front of the accused individuals. These managers, these teachers, these judges, these lawyers are members of the middle class. The members of these middle classes have common interests and they have common organisations for the defence of their interests as I will show. What I write here describes the situation in Western countries, but what about Tonga? I will try to show that in Tonga the axis capital/labour is very weak and that the majority of middle class members are in charge of the relationship between State and civil society.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

My first step for describing the birth of social classes in Tonga is to analyse the evolution of the social structure. When King Tupou I unified Tonga after the 19th century civil war, the social stratification was simple. At the apex of society was the Royal Family. Then there were the 30 nobles created by King Tupou I to replace the old chieftainships. Associated with the nobles were their spokesmen (matapule), slightly lower on the ladder even though some of them were socially important. At the bottom of the ladder were the commoners. It was an aristocratic society and as de Tocqueville put it, “once a commoner always a commoner”, to which I would add “once a noble, always a noble”. Today the King and the nobles still exist but things are more complicated and social classes are appearing in Tonga, and that can be seen as beginning through the division of labour. As in every traditional society, the division of labour in Tonga was
extremely sketchy; commoners were mainly rural people living by subsistence farming. This social stratification endured until the mid-20th century. Indeed the 1956 and 1966 censuses showed that more than 75 percent of the active population worked in farming and fisheries. The 2006 census showed that the percentage of people working in agriculture had now declined to just under one third. This considerable decrease in the number of people connected with farming actually goes along with a greater variety in jobs (see Table 1).

Table 1. Occupations of working population from Tonga census 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Legislators, Senior Officials, Managers</td>
<td>1.99 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Professionals + 3. Technicians and associated professionals</td>
<td>14.10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Clerks</td>
<td>5.21 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Service workers/shop &amp; market sales workers</td>
<td>8.56 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Skilled agricultural and fisheries workers</td>
<td>29.19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Craft and related trade workers</td>
<td>33.10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Plant &amp; machine operators &amp; assemblers</td>
<td>2.51 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Elementary occupations</td>
<td>3.88 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Armed Forces</td>
<td>1.48 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N = 35182</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The census gives other interesting information in terms of employment and the situation on the labour market, thus enabling me to refine the trend (see Table 2).

Adding up the first four columns of Table 2 shows that 66 percent of members of the active population are either wage earners or engaged in

Table 2. Source: Tonga census 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work for pay or operating business</th>
<th>Farming mainly for sale</th>
<th>Fishing mainly for sale</th>
<th>Handicrafts mainly for sale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farming mainly for own consumption</th>
<th>Fishing mainly for own consumption</th>
<th>Handicrafts for own consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a commercial activity, whereas 34 percent only are subsistence workers (including handicrafts). Moreover the census tells us that 38 percent of the active population are wage earners, that 2 percent are employers and 27 percent self-employed.

The trend is clear—in 2006 the division of labour was a fact in Tonga. This is confirmed by the composition of Tongan economy where only 25 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was provided by agriculture. Following Durkheim’s formulation, a shift can be observed from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. According to Durkheim (1960), what defines a society with a mechanical solidarity is that the division of labour within this society is poor and its cohesion relies on beliefs and values that are common to all its members who have very similar activities and functions. In this type of society, a group is more important than its members. By contrast, in a society with an organic solidarity, individuals no longer have strong common beliefs. Social cohesion at this stage rests on a clear division of labour, meaning that the various activities and functions of its members complement each other, and that the balance of society is ensured by the fact that these functions are complementary.

In Table 1 it is the second line, showing professionals, technicians and associated professionals, which is interesting in light of the middle class model defined by Monjardet and myself. About 50 percent of the people of that second line are working in education or health. About 60 percent of the category “professionals, technicians and associated professionals” are civil servants.

COMMON INTERESTS AND COMMON ORGANISATIONS

The existence of a true division of labour is not enough when speaking of social classes. It also needs to be shown that they are self conscious of themselves as a group, that they realise their common interests and that they try to defend these common interests, especially through organisations confronting the State or confronting the other classes.

At the end of the 1980s two professional associations were founded: the teachers’ association and the nurses’ association, both similar to those which exist in almost every country of the world. Actually these associations are unions and they are affiliated to the International Trade Union Confederation. In 2005 during their strike, the salaried employees in the public sector created the Public Service Association (PSA). The PSA does not have the status of a union but it actually acts as one. The vast majority of its members are professionals, such as teachers, MD’s, nurses and technicians. (The 2004 Civil List shows that 61 percent of the civil servants are professionals or technicians and associate professionals, not including police and prison staff). According to our
definition, they are the members of the salaried middle class situated between the State and civil society. On the other hand the members of the salaried middle class who are located between capital and labour are not very numerous because there are not too many big companies with a large workforce.7

The fact that there are very few big companies also explains that clerks, sales and trade workers, plant and machine and assembly workers, and elementary workers (i.e., the less skilled workers) are all in a situation of dependence, isolated with no organisation, which does not prevent them from taking part in marches or signing petitions.

A significant number of the small and midsize companies are organised in the Tongan Small Business Association (TSBA), a petty bourgeoisie organisation. TSBA opposes the economic free market policy typified by joining the World Trade Organisation and is against foreign companies, Chinese or palangi (European, white people). As for farmers, they have tried to organise themselves with the help of Futa Helu, Akilisi Pohiva, the Friendly Island Teacher Association and the Tonga Nurses Association, all of them middle class members (Hince 2000).

Most of the capitalist companies are grouped in the Tonga Chamber of Commerce and Industry, where the tenor is set by the large companies advocating a free market policy. Among those companies are the four banks of Tonga, the companies in which the Crown Prince was a shareholder and the company belonging to Fred Sevele who was a minister in 2005 and PM in 2006. Here is revealed an alliance between the nobility and capitalists, an alliance is epitomised by the well known close friendship between the Crown Prince and Sevele.

So, in 21st century Tonga there are horizontal organisations for the defence of common interests, as opposed to vertical situations based upon hierarchy, rank and family. These horizontal organisations, which group the actors on the basis of work, are a definite token of the existence of real social classes, and indeed are a statement of middle classes (both salaried middle class and petty bourgeoisie) and of bourgeoisie. However, it must be noted that the older structure of royalty (with its very important powers) and the nobility continue to exist and still play an important role in the country. Yet, it must also be noted that the nobility lost an important aspect of its power when it was re-formed by King Tupou I and its members constrained to “give” their land to the men of their of their tofia ‘fief’. Only the nobles who are involved in business have true power and actually they are allied with the bourgeoisie. Tonga is a society in transition from the state of traditional society to the state of modern society. Transition means that elements of the former society and of the new one will coexist.
In contrast to the situation described by George Marcus (1980) as a “compromise culture”, Tonga is rather now a “transitional culture”, as Paul Van der Grijp (1993) wrote. This means that both traditional and modern behaviours can be observed and, in fact, patterns of traditional behaviour can be witnessed quite frequently. Meanwhile, however, the importance of traditional Tongan values is declining. For example, the rule of avoidance between young brothers and sisters under the same roof is less often observed and the important traditional respect paid to nobility is also less frequent. In 1992 the noble Luani said: “I have heard of a noble being last person to be served in shops, and derogatory remarks being made against nobles”.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT

I have argued above that the global division of labour gave birth to social classes and that these classes are self conscious with their own horizontal organisations for the defence of their common interests. Now I will try to show how the middle classes have intervened in the evolution of the social movement. I do not intend to give a detailed historical account of the evolution of the social movement unfolding in Tonga since the beginning of the 1970s. Other people have already done so, in particular I.C. Campbell in his series of first-rate texts (1992, 1994, 2001, 2006, 2008a, 2008b) and Leslie Young (2007). I will only mention the events that seem essential to show the role of the middle classes. The social movement disrupting the Kingdom fall into three main periods.

The First Period: The fight against corruption and for accountability

In the 1970s the first move for democracy started at the core of the system thanks to a remarkable man. Langi Kavaliku had long been minister when he declared:

As long ago as 1975 I put up specific proposals to His Majesty for constitutional changes designed to give the people a greater voice in determining the course of their affairs while retaining and reinforcing the monarchy. It was debated in Cabinet at twelve separate meetings, to be deferred time after time and then dropped. (Bain 1993: 122)

The King chose to ignore Kavaliku’s suggestions. After that, the pro-democracy movement began to develop from the middle classes.

Late in 1978 the nurses’ strike broke out. Nurses were civil servants and their strike was targeted at the head nurse’s nepotism. The headline of the Tongan Chronicle, the state-owned weekly, of 18 January 1980 read: “Nurses’ Battle for Rights Continue”. In spite of threats, the nurses, backed by strong
popular support, had stood up to the government of the time—a bold move in so hierarchical a country. The government eventually gave in by appointing the head nurse to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The nurses were organised; they belonged to the middle class and had called for help from another member of the middle class, Futa Helu, the well known philosopher. This was a collective defence of their interests and it was the first time in Tonga that a group of professionals, members of the salaried middle class, organised and fought for their interests.

At that time political discussions began to develop in “kava clubs”, especially with the help of some young people who belonged to the middle class, almost all of whom were teachers or former teachers. (In kava clubs men engage in lengthy discussion of topical social matters while drinking kava.) They broadcast a critical radio programme which the government finally censored in 1985, and the main host of the programme, a teacher named Akilisi Pohiva, was dismissed without any explanation from the Ministry of Education. In 1986, the radio programme was replaced by a newsletter, the Kele‘a. The four founders of this bulletin were teachers or former teachers who had studied abroad; to put it more specifically they were members of the middle class with overseas training.

For a long time the only newspaper in Tonga that was not linked to any church was the Tonga Chronicle. With the creation of Kele‘a the public discovered a new approach to news and a number of political problems: the overpayment of ministers, unjustified per diems, misuse of public funds, corruption, etc. In all these debates the opposition bulletin Kele‘a was not the only one of its kind. In 1986 Pesi Fonua founded a very professional magazine, Matangi Tonga. Quickly it displayed its preference for democracy. I must add to these the creation in 1989 in New Zealand of Taimi o Tonga by Kalafi Moala. This newspaper has also been a supporter of democratisation. Actually all these newspapers were founded by members of the middle class.

The Friendly Islands Teachers Association was founded in the same year as Kele‘a. It is a typical salaried middle class organisation similar to teachers’ unions that exist in most countries. The leaders of this association would play an essential role in the civil servants’ strike of 2005 and in the constitution of the Public Service Association. Pohiva was also elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1987. These 1987 elections were the first with the main issues of the country at the core of the debate, contrasting with the past when essentially family and local factors were important. At that time the headline in Matangi Tonga ran: “A Political Tremor”. Pohiva has been re-elected with ease ever since 1987. Since his election, a significant number of candidates claiming a connection with the democratic movement have been
elected, who are generally middle class people. Their number has fluctuated between five and seven, so they always represented the majority among the People Representatives. It is interesting to note that the Kele’a editorial of December 1988—January 1989 ended as follows: “If the injustices and suffering of the people are not given due attention while there is peace and order, a time shall come when there will be no alternative but a revolution. Not through the will of anyone but by the culmination of a process over time.” This editorial seems to portend what was to happen in 2006.

In the Legislative Assembly it was impossible for the nine elected representatives of the people to muster a majority in Parliament. Indeed the nine elected nobles consistently voted with the members of the government, all of whom were appointed by the King and only accountable to him while they also sat as members of Parliament. So to all intents and purposes the King had legislative as well as executive power. This is a long way from the separation of powers. That is why the opposition could wage no more than guerrilla warfare against government in order to gain some clout, both inside and outside Parliament. However the mere denunciation of abuse and corruption was fruitless and everything went on as before.

So the opposition moved from denunciation to a demand for accountability, arguing in substance as follows: in a money market economy, taxpayers have the right to expect services and to hold the government accountable regarding public funds. This would mean that the government ministers, whether nobles or elected by the people, would need to account for what they do. The ultimate meaning of this demand for accountability was that the people stand above the King since one is accountable only to one’s superior. The sacrilegious character of this demand may be understood if one recalls that according to tradition the King is descended from three royal lineages, the oldest one being of divine origin and that, according to the Constitution, the King is a sacred person.

A decisive event occurred in 1982: the government decided to sell Tongan passports to foreigners, who were mostly Chinese. Such a sale, which challenged Tongan identity, was ill-received by the population. As Papiloa Foliaki, a well known businesswoman and former People Representative expressed it: “It is an arrow in the heart of the people” (Bain 1993: 167). Matangi Tonga ran a headline: “Tonga has sold its soul.” The sale raised such an intense fury because the money collected was not part of the State budget but allotted to an opaque fund. The millions of paʻangas thus collected eventually vanished after they were deposited with an American businessman. This sale brought about violent reactions in the country, including several petitions and a large demonstration on 8 March 1991 in which the leaders of the Free Wesleyan Church and of the Catholic Church took part.
The Second Period: The fight for democracy

Parliament was mainly used by People’s Representatives as a sounding chamber since gaining a majority was precluded. In November 1992 a large Convention on Democracy in Tonga was organised and on this occasion the Association of Democrat Reformers was officially created. The participants in the Convention came from almost every sector of Tongan society except the nobility. There were elected MPs and among them the best known, Pohiva. There were also numerous members of the various Christian churches, notably the Reverend Havea, the President of the Free Wesleyan Church (the King’s Church), and the Catholic Bishop of Tonga, Finau. There were numerous intellectuals like Sione Lātūkefu, Futa Helu and Epeli Hau‘ofa, jurists like Laki Niu, and many civil servants. Members of the business world like Fred Sevele or P. Foliaki were also present. One of the main interventions of the Convention was that Tongan monarchy had to resemble apolitical British monarchy. In 1983 the alliance that I observed was between members of the middle classes (civil servants, professionals, intellectuals, etc.) and of the bourgeoisie (businessmen). Nevertheless it seems clear that the leaders of the Human Rights and Democracy Movement (HRDMT) were predominantly members of the middle classes.

In 1999 a second Convention was again organised by HRDMT. The announced topic for consideration was “A Search for a Democratic Model Suitable for Tonga for the Year 2000”. This second Convention attracted a much smaller crowd. Yet it remains particularly interesting because of the speech by Fred Sevele (a minister in 2005 and the PM from 2006 to 2010), who praised private business and blamed the government for not fully supporting it. In the text of his speech, he quoted Margaret Thatcher. At no time did Sevele speak for or against the change in the Constitution, not once did he use the word “democracy”, and praise for private business was written in the resolutions adopted by the Convention. It looks like a compromise between the bourgeoisie and the middle classes. The main leaders of the reform movement, who come from the middle class, do not view Tonga’s economic development in this way at all.

At the same time, there were unnumbered very large popular demonstrations about various problems. These demonstrations almost always had to do with social prejudice, unequal distribution of wealth, and corruption among government members and Members of Parliament. They were most often led by pro-democracy People’s Representatives, and always by Catholic and less often Wesleyan leaders. These demonstrations were impressive, expressing continuous discontent and strengthening the protest movement against royal government. On top of these large demonstrations, petitions addressed to the authorities and often signed by thousands of people, mobilised the population
and put further pressure on the government. Demonstrations and petitions were central to the movement’s strategy.

As for the government, it could only think in terms of repression of the reform movement. Journalists were subject to numerous persecutions and sent to trial in order to gag the opposition press. One of the important aspects of this repression was an attempt to alter the Constitution in order to reduce the freedom of speech. Of course, this provoked numerous protests and the change was eventually rejected in court where the highest judges are English-speaking foreigners.

It has not often been noticed that the royal power took an ever increasing number of security measures during the same period. Tonga boasts an army though it is hard to imagine what foreign power might attack the country. It therefore appears that the army, despite its official name (Tonga Defence Services), is less there to defend the country than to insure home security. In the early 1970s the army’s strength was not above 50, while in 2006 it had reached 520. In 1966, the army represented 0.32 percent of the active population; in 2006 it represented 1.48 percent, an increase of 4.6 percent and far above the increase in the total population. Personally I took note that in 1983 the fence surrounding the Royal Palace was made of small wooden planks that could be easily breached. A few years later a low wall was surmounted by tall metal spikes. It is obvious that the royal power was early deeply worried by the rising pressure from the pro-democracy movement.

The Third Period: Ending in the drama of November 2006

This is the key period, first because of the serious events in 2005 (the civil servants’ strike) and 2006 (the Nuku‘alofoa riot), and second because it was the beginning of a process towards a change in the Constitution.

In November 2004 the King announced he had decided to appoint four new ministers chosen from the members of the Legislative Assembly: two among elected nobles and two among the People’s Representatives. Fred Sevele, a businessman, a People’s Representative and a supporter of HRDMT, became Minister for Labour, Commerce and Industry in March 2005. The move failed to convince everyone, as Sevele had long been known as being very close to the Crown Prince. As time went by, the people became increasingly exasperated. It is true that the massive down-sizing of the civil service and consequent job losses, the new taxes, the procrastination and hesitation of the royal power regarding democratic claims, and inflation all contributed to the disquiet. More egregious were the high price rises of electricity at the very moment when the owners of the electricity company, the Crown Prince and his partner Ramanlal, voted themselves extravagant salaries. People were both really anxious and their more or less dormant anger was aroused. Within
a few months of 2005, there were several mass demonstrations, especially in May, about the Shoreline Company; 10,000 people\textsuperscript{17} were in the streets creating the biggest march ever in Tonga.

At the March 2005 elections seven People’s Representatives out of nine were from the pro-democracy movement. In this context the underpaid civil servants went on strike with strong salary claims after a new civil service wage scale was implemented in June 2005. That scale increased a few high-level civil servants’ salaries by up to 50 percent whereas some at the bottom of the ladder had very low, even no, rises. Strikers gathered every day at Pangai Si’i just in front of the Royal Palace. The population sympathised with the strikers and real solidarity grew for their cause. And on 8 August there was an enormous march of support in Nuku’alofa. On this occasion a break in the alliance of the salaried middle class and the bourgeois class became visible as the strikers, opposing a government which remained deaf to their claims and threatened them, had to deal in particular with Fred Sevele, the new Labour Minister. Strikers could have expected him, as a member of HRDMT, to support them, but he did not. At this point a new alliance was formed between the salaried middle class, united mainly in the Public Service Association, and the petty bourgeoisie, small entrepreneurs within the Tonga Small Business Association, farmers and others. The Tonga National Council of Churches also supported strikers. One must not forget that all primary school teachers and some secondary school teachers are civil servants, just as are the vast majority of doctors and nurses, the staff at the port facilities and other state functionaries. So even if the civil servants are a minority,\textsuperscript{18} when they go on strike they paralyse the country. The majority of the strikers were professionals, technicians and associated professionals, i.e., members of the middle classes, who have their own organisations. The leaders of the Public Service Association, which was founded during the strike, were almost all members of the salaried middle class: civil servants of relatively high level like Dr Maliu Takai (National Disaster Management Office) and Dr Viliami Fakava (Ministry of Agriculture), teachers like Finau Tutone and Vili Vete, physicians like Dr Ana Akaoula and Dr Aivi Puloka (Vaiola Hospital), and technicians like Mele Amanaki (Ministry of Agriculture).

As the strike went on, a new claim arose calling for the reform of the Constitution. The strike gained a great victory. The claims for significantly higher salaries were satisfied and a National Committee for Political Reforms (NCPR) was created by the Legislative Assembly with Prince Tu‘i Pelehake\textsuperscript{19} as Chairman. The purpose of that Committee was “to receive and consider submissions, hold consultations and facilitate talanoa ‘informal talks’ relating to political and constitutional reforms and recommend legislation with a view to building national unity and promoting the social and economic advancement
of the people”. In my estimation as well as that of the participants, the scope of such a victory marked a real turning point. Getting the better of a government composed of ministers appointed by the King and accountable to him only was something of a scandal in itself. Once the strikers added to their claims a change in the Constitution, the whole existing system in all respects-economic, political and symbolic—would be disrupted. The government was soundly defeated. The regime saw what dangers lay ahead. Not long after the civil service strike Prime Minister ‘Ulukala Lavaka Ata, a son of the King, suddenly resigned and Fred Sevele was appointed, on 11 February 2006, as interim Prime Minister by the Crown Prince, then Prince Regent, on behalf of his father. When the King returned, he confirmed Sevele in this post on 30 March. It was obvious to all that this was the work of the Crown Prince, Sevele’s old friend. He was the first non-noble appointed Prime Minister and also the first Prime Minister; he was also an elected People’s Representative. As for Pohiva, he quickly left the National Committee for Political Reform and created his own alternative group, the People’s Committee for Political Reform, with a membership of People’s Representatives, the Tongan Small Business Association and public servants.

After the tragic death of Prince Tu‘i Pelehake in a California motorway accident, the National Committee for Political Reform continued its work under the direction of another member of the middle class, Tongan economist Sitiveni Halapua, who had been the head of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Centre, University of Hawai‘i. Halapua handed in his report in August 2006. The first recommendation was that all members of the Parliament, including nobles, would be elected by the people, and that the King would choose the Prime Minister among the Members of Parliament, then the chosen Prime Minister would choose his ministers from among the other MPs. On 16 October 2006, in a government declaration of a roadmap for future reform planning, the Prime Minister asked for the creation of a new tripartite commission: the government, without any consultation, aired its preferences in the Legislative Assembly. The commission’s three parts would be three Peoples’ Representatives, three Nobles’ Representatives and three representatives from the Cabinet. This representative membership was justified as follows by Lopeti Senituli, adviser to the Prime Minister:

What the NCPR report recommended was the total disenfranchisement of His Majesty the King. Yet the Constitution of Tonga, and all the rights and freedoms entrenched in it including the right to a piece of land for free, was a gift from His Majesty, King George Tupou I in 1875. It is a tantamount Regicide.
So at this one moment, there were three reform agendas in competition: the NCPR’s created by the Legislative Assembly, the government’s and Pohiva’s. The leaders of the pro-democracy movement quickly perceived the creation of the new government commission (named “Constitutional and Electoral Commission”) as a way of postponing reform based on the NCPR Report so that the government could present a reform following its own guidelines. At the end of the parliamentary session, Pohiva and his colleagues strategically pressed to alter the session’s agenda in order to obtain a vote on the NCPR Report which causing great confusion within the Legislative Assembly. On 16 November, the crowd marched and joined a protest by supporters of OBN TV station. This demonstration degenerated into a violent riot; people first attacked public buildings and the King’s and the Prime Minister’s properties, as well as Chinese businesses. The riot caused eight fatalities from the fire in the electricity company partly owned by the Crown Prince. Clearly the demonstration quickly spiralled out of control with members of the crowd looting shops. Had this destruction been planned, as some think they were? And if so, by whom? Today it is impossible to answer these questions and, to my knowledge, no commission of inquiry was appointed to investigate these events.

DISCUSSION

In the first part of this article, using an analysis of the social structure, I tried to show that the global division of labour in Tonga is now important. It is now an organic society, meaning the beginning of the birth of social classes. I have shown that these classes have a collective awareness of their common interests and that they are organised for the defence of their interests. Using the theory of middle classes produced by D. Monjardet and myself, I have shown the existence of a middle class in charge, on one hand, of the apparatus of management of the relationship between the State and the civil society and, on the other hand, in charge of apparatus of management of the relationship between capital and labour. But in the Tongan case middle class members are not very numerous because there are only a few big companies with an important workforce. That point is essential if one wants to understand the difference between Tonga and the Western countries.

The existence of the Tongan middle class was confirmed by its action in the civil servants’ strike, a strike led mainly by members of the middle class. The middle class has self-consciousness and tries to defend its interests. The middle class existence is confirmed in a general manner by its constant advocacy of democracy.
But other factors have played an important role in the 2005 and 2006 events and it seems necessary to assess these other factors involved in the events—the economic situation on the one hand, and the international influence on the other.

The Economic Situation
The economic situation of a country exerts a considerable influence on its social and political situation. Firstly it must be recognised that the development of social classes is obviously linked to the economic development and to know that development was the basis of King Tupou IV’s policy. But in spite of King Tupou IV’s efforts the Tongan economic situation was not satisfactory and was deteriorating. For example, in terms of international trade, the situation had been very simple for a long time: Tonga imports a lot and exports very little. In 2004-05 the deficit of the balance of merchandise trade was 173.1 millions of pa’angas (a pa’anga converts to about US$0.60), in 2005-06 it was 214.4 million, and in 2006-07 it was 190.8 million. The public debt is growing and the inflation rate (according to the Consumer Price Index) between 2003-04 and 2005-2006 was never under 8 percent. Between 2002 and 2008 the mean inflation rate in Tonga was the highest among the small countries of the Pacific (IMF). According to a 2004 survey by the Asian Development Bank, around 23 percent of the population live below the national poverty line.

Under pressure from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, Tongan governments have been pursuing a strict free market policy for several years with numerous privatisations. As soon as he came into office, Prime Minister Sevele eulogised private business. Sevele’s appointment as PM was warmly welcomed by businessmen in Tonga and especially by the Tonga Chamber of Commerce—one of Sevele’s ministers being a former Chairman of the Chamber. In the context of this policy, we must note that Tonga joined the World Trade Organisation, which exposed it to global competition and obliged it to modify its tax system. The petty bourgeoisie, especially the Tongan Small Business Association, was against that liberal policy, against the WTO and against the foreign business (especially Chinese business). With the rejection of these neo-liberal economic policies the petty bourgeoisie ascribes to the nationalism and the xenophobia of a very important part of the pro-democracy activists. This provided the basis for the new alliance between the middle class and the petty bourgeoisie. On several occasions Akilisi Pohiva, the pro-democracy movement leader, said that Chinese businesses in Tonga were a danger to employment and that they were now beginning to dominate the small retail stores. Going further Futa Helu (1999: 179) wrote that “our highest priority cannot be economic growth. Far from putting output levels in the forefront of our social development and
emphasising growth and nothing but growth, I say that distribution is at least as important as productivity.” At this time the pro-democracy movement rarely expressed its opinions about the economic questions because for that movement the first question was the political question, contrary to the conservatives who always have a strictly reverse position.

**International Influence**

As well as that middle class and petty bourgeoisie xenophobia it is important to note the international factor. First, what must be kept in mind is that international aid is a considerable force in Tonga both in amounts of money and numbers of staff. That international aid influences the behaviour of Tongan people, especially in terms of consumption by the middle class as Besnier (2009) has argued. But what is more important is that this international influence is exercised through the numerous connections that the 100,000 Tongans living in Western democratic countries (actually as many people as in Tonga proper) still maintain with their homeland. Tongans living abroad regularly send money and also numerous goods. These migrants frequently come back to Tonga for weddings and funerals, and for celebratory anniversaries of the founding of churches or colleges. As Helen Lee (2004) has written, “All Tongans are connected.” One must also take into account that a fair number of Tongans have been educated abroad, which makes them more open to democratic ideas and they bring these ideas back to Tonga. This is the case for a very important portion of middle class people and for the huge majority of the pro-democracy movement leaders. This situation echoes what Hau’ofa (1994: 425) wrote about “a mobile internationalised middle class that provides among other things intellectual and ideological leadership to social movements”. What I am both saying, directly or indirectly, is that the democratic movement was mainly prompted by members of the middle class in Tonga and abroad, with the international factor playing an essential role.

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A changing social structure with a growing global division of labour, the rise of social classes with their own organisations for the defence of their interests, the economic development with on the one hand the growth of individualism and on the other hand the growth of inequality, the very important weight carried by the diaspora, all these factors have caused more vocal demands for democracy. Yet it took a long time before these claims began to be heard, until the Monarchy eventually understood that turning a deaf ear to them created a serious threat to its regime. But that recognition was too late to avoid the 2005 strike and the dramatic 2006 event. Giving a detailed account of these
events was not what I intended to do; I neither blame nor praise. My purpose has been to analyse the forces involved and their dynamics in the 2005 and 2006 events, focusing on the role of emerging social classes, especially middle classes. What happened after 16 November 2006 is another story.

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NOTES

1. Five years before, in 1998, K. James wrote a paper about Tonga entitled “Analysing the emergent middle class—the 1990s”, but it does not appear in her 2003 references.
2. The word elite is ambiguous when it is not further specified because, for example, there are educated conservatives elites or educated reformer elites and obviously these are not the same thing.
3. See N. Besnier (2009) for another very interesting approach to the middle class. In certain ways our analyses are complementary.
5. That figure was calculated with the data of the Public Service Commission and of the Civil Servant List.
6. It must be added that there exist several professional associations which are also typically middle class, for instance the Tonga Law Society whose chairman Laki Niu played a significant role in the political life.
7. In the 2006 census only two percent were employers.
10. The first seeds of democracy were sown by the King Tupou I (c.1797-1893). See Bataille & Benguigui 2005.
11. Futa Helu pers. comm. The late Futa Helu often served as an eminence grise in the pro-democracy movement.
12. In 1988 the government was sentenced for unfair dismissal after a complaint by Pohiva. This was important because it paved the way for other lawsuits against the Government.
13. The only radio station was also state-owned.
14. In its issue of September 1989, the leading article ended as follows: “There is no doubt we need a parliament where good virtue prevails, which has the power to rule, a parliament of the people, for the people and by the people.”
15. In 1998 its name became the Human Rights and Democracy Movement of Tonga (HRDMT).
16. See also Campbell 1992: 81.
17. When the electricity company was privatised to the Crown Prince and the Ramanlals, the price of the electricity increased in some cases by 300-400 percent (Campbell 2006: 53).
18. The whole population of the Tongan archipelago is about 100,000.
19. In 2005 there were about 4700 civil servants.
20. Prince Tu‘i Pelehake was the son of a Prime Minister and first cousin to King George V. He had chosen to be with the pro-democracy side.
23. The station had just received an eviction letter from the place where it was working.
24. Except the workers who cannot organise themselves because they are too dispersed these days.
25. But there was a basic contradiction; the King wanted both progress and tradition. Ian Campbell (1992: 79) taxed the King with having brought with him to the throne the seeds of political instability insofar as he was a modernising radical.
26. Another example: Sevele appointed three members from the private sector (including one the richest businessmen in Tonga, and a former treasurer of the Chamber of Commerce) to the Public Service Commission.
27. That nationalism became clearly apparent when the government decided to sell passports to foreigners.
28. See for instance what was said on 16 September 2011 by the new MP by Tongatapu Falisi Tupou, who works for the Kele‘a newspaper, about his goals: “Firstly to, to full democracy in Tonga. But now its a half democracy now eh. So we try to full democracy first. And second to develop our economy” (retrieved from Radio New Zealand International: www.rnzi.com).
29. They are the first income source of the country, ahead of tourism and exportations. It is owing to them that the balance of current accounts is less disastrous that one might think in view of the huge deficit of the balance of trade. They are essential to the country. The vast majority of Tongans benefit from them: in 2006, 82 percent of the homes received remittances and these remittances were the main income source for 20 percent of them (Census 2006).

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ABSTRACT

After a long strike of civil servants in 2005, dramatic events occurred in November 2006 in Tonga. The evolution of the social structure focusing on the role of emerging social classes, especially middle classes, the development of a pro-democracy movement, the important weight carried by the diaspora are analysed to try to understand these events.

Keywords: Tonga, classes, democracy, social movement.