Political Development in Comoros

JOHN M. OSTHEIMER*

THE COMORO ISLANDS: BACKGROUND TO INDEPENDENCE

The Western Indian Ocean is alive with political change. Mauritius, scene of the recent OCAM conference, continues to show signs of searching for an identity; and the Creole cultural relationship with Africa is an important part of the islands' current development. Madagascar continues, since the coup of 1972, to move towards its "second independence": a more complete psychological—as well as actual—break from France. Although a French Department, spectacular growth of the "autonomist" political sector in elections from 1967 to 1973 indicates that change may be in the offing in Reunion. Even tiny Seychelles, Britain's crown colony "paradise", is witnessing intense political debate over continued colonial status. The great powers watch these sudden developments searching for openings,1 while countries peripheral to the Western Indian Ocean stress the danger of great power conflicts.2 In this setting, the rapid turn of the Comoros toward independence is significant beyond the archipelago's small size.

Midway between Madagascar's northern tip and the African mainland lie the four islands of the Comoro Archipelago.3 With nearly 300,000 people, these four islands are quite homogeneous in racial, linguistic and historical terms; although at least the southern-most one, Mayotte, provides some contrasts that have become politically important. Historically, the Comoro islands form a single basic unit. The Comorian people are primarily African, the result of centuries of movement from the continent. By the 5th Century A.D., these African contributions were specifically Shirazi, and, although the coastal centres of the Swahili culture were constantly shifting as cities like Kilwa rose and fell, the racial features, dress, and eventually the language and religion,

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2 For example, see the article by J. C. de L'Estrac, "Océan Indien, Zone de Paix; les Appétits et les Intérêts Derrière un Slogan," Lumière (Tananarive) 25 March 1973.

came to mirror this major influence. Thus, the Comoros were inhabited islands with their own history and culture before the Europeans arrived. But the four islands also have differing traditions that have helped to produce strong rivalries that are potentially seriously disruptive. Inter-island piracy in past centuries has contributed to a legacy of suspicions. Besides this, the islands have been subjected to a series of ethnic cross-pressures from coastal East Africa and from Madagascar.

The manner of French acquisition of the four Comoro islands added to the differences between them. Mayotte was taken quite peacefully. As one historian put it, the island was so troubled by incursions from northwestern Madagascar's pirates that she "deliberately gave herself to France on April 25, 1854". France then ruled Mayotte until 1878 in conjunction with the Malgache island of Nossi-bé, and even after that time, Nossi-bé and other settlements of northern Madagascar have been receiving centres for Comorian emigration. Although French rule was also declared over the other three islands during the 1840s, peaceful cooperation and development was more extensive on Mayotte than elsewhere. In contrast to the situation on Mayotte, the French control over the three northern islands was far more tenuous during the early decades. This is demonstrated by the fact that the negotiations leading to the final Act of Abdication to France by the Sultan of Anjouan finally took place in 1909. Also, the German flag flew over part of Grand Comoro in the 1880s as a result of intrigues among the Sultanates of that island.

In addition to the recent historical differences between the islands, there is a visible age difference geologically. Mayotte, like the other three, is volcanic but the island has "decayed" to the point where its soils are comparatively rich and deep, its mountains not significant as communication barriers, and its waters protected by an extensive coral outer reef. This final difference is added to the others to defend the claims of the Mahori (the people of Mayotte) to the right to select their own destiny. Marcel Henri, the leader of the Mahori Movement (MM) stresses this very strongly: he points out that Mahoris speak Swahili differently from other Comorians and are discriminated against when they travel to the other islands. Their 'greater Malgache blood usually ensures that they will not escape recognition. Politicians from the other three islands constantly fight this separatist argument with statements stressing the unity of


5 For an example of these pressures, see "Piratérie Sakalawa; Raid sur les Comores," extract from "La Ville des Antalaoatra Majunga," Promo al Camar, May 1971, pp. 13-15.

6 Faurec, "Voyage aux Iles Comores," op. cit., p. 11.


8 Personal interview with Marcel Henri, Dzaoudzi, 28 April 1973.
Comorian experience, and asking for subsequent unity of actions. As Ahmed Abdallah, current President of the Governing Council put it:

Comorians, [unity] is not only the reunion among the political parties. Also it is foremost for all of you a new way of thinking and living together. It is searching, without passions, for solutions that preserve the traditions of religion and custom to which we are powerfully attached, which treat with respect the particularisms of each of the islands, which place in harmony the heritages of the past with the necessities of the modern world, with the needs of a new society. . . .9

Today, the Comoros could certainly never be used to bolster an argument for the benefits of empire. They are pitifully poor, there is virtually no press and only a single secondary school. Per capita income is surely among the lowest in the world.10 The economy is based on plantation agriculture, and thus dependent on crops that need price supports in order to keep the effects of changing world demand away from the farmers themselves. Until recently, this economic dependence was used as a major argument favouring continued attachment: according to a former Comorian President of the Governing Council, Comoros must remain “at the bosom of the French Republic”.11

Some of the Comoros’ problems are, to be sure, preordained by geographical factors. No significant mineral resources have been discovered. There is not even a surface water supply on porous Grand Comoro, only man-made catchments and wells. Soils are for the most part very poor, and fishing has little developmental potential because continental shelves and banks are virtually non-existent. To add to this, periodically, there are disastrous cyclones.

Although all the islands are poor by world standards, the poverty is unevenly distributed. Table 1 indicates the relative poverty of Anjouan and Grand Comoro. One result of this uneven distribution is varying nutritional standards. Mahoris and Mohelians are better fed, with caloric intakes of over 3,000 units per day, as compared with an average of 2,250 on Grand Comoro and 1,900 on Anjouan.12 Politically, differentials such as these explain much of the inter-island dissension over Comoros’ future. The richer islands, especially Mayotte, fear the pressures of the two more populous, but poorer, ones. These jealousies cause the major internal political issue of the islands: unity with independence, or separation?

Each island Government is severely limited in its attempt to deal with developmental problems because of the lack of revenues. For example, the District Government for Anjouan has announced that the budget for 1973 has been cut roughly 10 per cent from 1972.13 French Government aid has not

9 Speech of 26 January 1973. Printed in Info-Comores, 3 February 1973, p. 3. For other calls for unity see the speeches of former President Said Ibrahim, 2 October 1971, in Promo al Camar, October 1971, pp. 12-20. All translations from French used in this report are by the author unless otherwise indicated.
10 Estimates are $20.00 by P. DeCraene, The Guardian, 23 December 1972; $60.00 by The People (Seychelles), 6 December 1972, p. 12.
11 This June 1971 speech by President Said Ibrahim is a good example of the dependence argument at work. Promo al Camar, July 1971, pp. 4-8.
12 Terr. des Comores, Commissariat au Plan et au Developpement, Rapport. . . , op. cit.
Table 1—Basic Geographic and Demographic Comparisons of the Comoro Islands

<table>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forest %</td>
<td>Pasture %</td>
<td>Cultivable Ground</td>
<td>Useless %</td>
<td>1958 pop. density per sq. km. total</td>
<td>1970 pop. density per sq. km. total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Comoro</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjouan</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayotte</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohéli</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average totals</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1958 pop. density per sq. km. cultivatable ground only</td>
<td>1970 pop. density per sq. km. cultivatable ground only</td>
<td>Index (1958 = 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Comoro</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjouan</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayotte</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohéli</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average totals:</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note: The growth index column (9) applies to both columns 6 and 7.

been at levels that would overcome even the most basic problems stemming from underdevelopment. As the Comorian deputy to the French National Assembly pointed out to that body, the number of doctors has actually fallen on some of the islands.\textsuperscript{14}

The political results of this combination of underdevelopment have been quite predictable, although the timing of events has not. For many years the Comoros slept, politically somnolent while the more educationally advanced populations of Africa and Asia were each reaching their respective national years of awakening. Only small, very unrepresentative, groups of Comorians who had reached the outside world had drawn the obvious lesson of comparison, and dared to think the situation of their islands could also change. Then finally, during the last two years, the political leaders still in the Comoros have decided, in a complete turnaround, that their islands would be more likely to develop with greater independence from France. After a brief survey of the current governmental structure, this study will concentrate on the development of independence politics in Comoros: a place that one expert in French politics stated in 1962 was “unlikely to seek independence in any immediate foreseeable future”.\textsuperscript{15}

THE STRUCTURE OF COMOROS GOVERNMENT

Currently, the Comoro Islands are formally governed by a High Commissioner who reports to the Minister of Overseas Territories and Departments (T.O.M. and D.O.M.) in the French Government.\textsuperscript{16} Several legislative changes since the Fifth Republic’s beginning have increased the internal autonomy of the islands,\textsuperscript{17} but essentially, it is still correct to say that France holds the preponderance of power, especially in the important realms of internal security.\textsuperscript{18} Chart 1 indicates the present distribution of governmental powers.

After 1962, the Comoros were allowed a Territorial Legislature (now 39 members) with a Council of Government (cabinet) of from 6 to 9 Ministers. This system could be called a modified parliamentary type. Members of the Legislature of the Territory (Chamber of Deputies of the Comoros) might be asked by the President of the Council of Government to serve as Ministers in his Government, in which case their seat in the Chamber is filled by their “replacement”. The names of these replacements are stipulated prior to the

\textsuperscript{14} Speech by Mohamed Ahmed, Paris, 5 November 1969. Cited in Promo al Camar, November 1969, p. 2. This state of affairs provides the radical Comorian nationalist movement based in Dar es Salaam with some of its most effective propaganda, see “Comorians Demand Their Independence,” The People, 22 November 1972, p. 11.


\textsuperscript{16} Other Overseas Territories are French Guiana, French Territory of Afars and Issas (Somaliland), St. Pierre and Miquelon, Polynesia and New Caledonia. Their status is determined by Article 72 of the Constitution of 1958. Judicial structures were not analysed in this report. They are described in Promo al Camar, December 1970, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{17} These are Law No. 61-1412 of 22 December 1962, and the Law of 3 January 1968. Articles 73 and 74 of the 1958 Constitution allow such modification.

\textsuperscript{18} It is significant that according to Article 72, Section 3, the High Commissioner “shall be responsible for the national French interests, for administrative supervision, and for seeing that the laws are respected”.

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**Chart 1—The Structures of Government in the Territory of Comoros**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The French Government—Ministry of Overseas Departments and Territories</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Commissariat at Moroni:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French High Commissioner and Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powers: foreign relations and defence, internal security under “emergency conditions”, immigration and emigration, French aid, information and broadcasting, police, judiciary, higher education, commerce and finance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In all other domains, the Territory is sovereign.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Governing Council of Comoros:**

- May propose dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies, to be decreed by French Council of Ministers.

**Sub-Territorial Level Governments:**

- Prefectures (one Prefect for each Island) Sub-prefectures on each island

election and in this way bye-elections are avoided while the Chamber is kept at full strength. The life of the Chamber is five years.

The system differs from the pure parliamentary type in that Cabinet Ministers do not keep their seats, but it is similar in the important concept of "no-confidence". The Council of Government is responsible before the Chamber of Deputies, while to balance this, the Chamber of Deputies may be dissolved by decree taken in the Council.\textsuperscript{19}

It is not necessary for legislators to be replaced if they are also serving in the French Government. One of the two Comorian Deputies to the French National Assembly, Mohamed Ahmed, and the Senator from Comoros to the French Senate, Said Mohamed Jaffar (the current President of the Comoros Chamber of Deputies) occupy such dual roles.\textsuperscript{20}

It is ironic that the Comoros possess such an elaborate system of local government and representation on a political base that is extremely shallow. The systems of organised political groups,\textsuperscript{21} and written political communications are virtually non-existent,\textsuperscript{22} indicating a population that is basically without practice in or inclination toward participatory politics. Yet below the Territorial level, each island possesses a district level government (circumscription) complete with a Legislative Chamber, and these island governments are sub-divided into legislative districts for leadership purposes, and into sub-prefectures for administration.

One can perhaps explain some of this void in political development by the long-term effects of emigration. The French have encouraged emigration which was given the lack of resources and development, and have made it easy by a concept of citizenship that entitles Comorians to all the rights of Frenchmen, for example, French consular protection. But an important effect of this on the islands is that many of the more active minds have left, defusing the 'islands' politics and delaying the independence attitude. However, it could be also that the same demoralising effects of underdevelopment that long caused Comorians to emigrate have now served to stimulate interest in independence. The mood in 1971, which seems to have been the year which changed many minds on the independence issue, was called by an editorial in the islands' only journal, "pessimistic, morose, and undeceived".\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19} Description of current Comorian Government occurs in Terr. des Comores, \textit{Rapport} \ldots, op. cit. The replacement system can be seen in action in the cases of five members of the current Governing Council. See \textit{Info-Comores}, 17 March 1973, pp. 6-7.

\textsuperscript{20} French law pertaining to the Comorian electoral process for senatorial elections is found in \textit{Info-Comores}, 17 March 1973, p. 3, and 2 April 1973, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{21} Although 100 dock workers did recently strike in Moroni (\textit{Info-Comores}, 17 March 1973, p. 8), there are no trade unions at all, and no other political associations of any type other than the political parties and the business organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, the planters, Air Comores, etc.

\textsuperscript{22} Until April 1972, an interesting and informative monthly, \textit{Promo al Camar}, was printed by B.D.P.A. in Moroni. Then in January 1973, a French Chief of Cultural Affairs Services was recruited to put out the new bimonthly, \textit{Info-Comores}. Outside of this governmental effort, there is no private press whatsoever! Only a recently appearing underground PASOCCO paper, \textit{Uhuru}, mars this perfect record.

Table 2—PARTY COMPOSITION OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, TERRITORY OF COMOROS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Island</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of seats</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Comoro</td>
<td>RDPC (Democratic Assembly of Comorian People)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UDC (Democratic Union of the Comoros)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjouan</td>
<td>PSDC (Social Democratic Party of Comoros)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UDC</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohéli</td>
<td>RDPC</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayotte</td>
<td>MM (Mahorais Movement)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The major Comorian political parties are difficult to keep straight because of the importance of personal relationships in determining membership. An example of this is the Turqui family, which has three brothers and all three serve different political parties because there is not "enough room" in one. But in spite of this relative importance of personality at the expense of policy and ideology differences, it is possible to generalise about the major parties. There are essentially two varieties of Comorian political parties: traditional parties based on the established elite, and ideological-reformist parties. The analysis becomes easier when it reaches the smaller parties of the ideological-reformist type, which are not represented in the Chamber of Deputies but are crucially important in the overall process of political development.

Currently the majority party in the popular vote, RDPC (Democratic Assembly of the Comorian People) was created in August 1968. It has central committee membership in each island (four members from each, plus five founders), and these planners meet once a year. During the year, four regional RDPC committees handle party business and direct the activities of the local committees on each island.

While RDPC is certainly one of the "traditional" parties in the sense that its leadership is derived directly from the leading stratum in the population, and although it does not advocate basic reform of the society, its programme includes a certain measure of reform. RDPC leaders have, since 1972, begun to make statements concerning land reform, and have at times come out against monopoly, either in the hands of the indigenous or French investors. Its views are strongly francophile, but in the liberal tradition, stressing reorganisation of administration where necessary. Furthermore, the party is officially in favour of the liberation and emancipation of Comorian women, not a small reformist step to take in such a traditionalist Moslem society. Among the traditional parties, RDPC has made the clearest statements of position (although as is frequently the case in the Comoros, it is nearly impossible to find this in written form), and has the best organisational structure. It is basically middle class which in the Comoros means civil servants, teachers, and shop-keepers—and has made some ties with the youth.

24 The most forceful RDPC leader in 1972 was Mouzaoir Abdallah, the Secretary-General.
Perhaps some of the strength of RDPC comes from the fact that it was long an opposition party, not in its present form, but with less structure as a group that has for years been called the "whites" (parti blanc). Until 1970, during the UDC presidency of Dr. Said Mohamed Sheikh, RDPC was the voice of reform against a government that represented the most traditional of options. After Sheikh's death in 1970, RDPC took advantage of the competitions of personalities within UDC, accepted some ministerial posts, and became part of an increasing coalition by autumn 1972. The RDPC leader, Prince Said Ibrahim, was President of the Council of Government for a time, but his position typifies why one must be cautious of generalising about the traditional parties. The policy positions ascribed to the RDPC above do not apply to him, and he resigned because of conflict with these developing positions and eventually founded a new party (see below). Said Mohamed Jaffar, who made the call for independence, and Mouzaoir Abdallah, chief architect of the new multi-party coalition, are more typical of RDPC views.

The election of 3 December 1972, gave RDPC (in conjunction with its allies from Anjouan, PSDC) the relative majority of the popular vote, although UDC still controls the relative majority of Chamber seats by a margin of 18-16, and has control of the Governing Council.

UDC derives from the traditionally powerful group which has been identified since elections began as the "greens" (parti vert). The latest form of this group was created in December 1968, like RDPC, for the purposes of competing in the 1970 elections. Its structure resembles that of RDPC, with a central committee of 24 (6 from each island) that meets three times each year. Formally, UDC possesses a structure down to the party sections on each island, and sub-sections that coordinate the activities of the village cells. But, in reality, UDC's organisation is perhaps the weakest of all in relation to its size.

UDC policy attitudes are usually characterised as more conservative and traditional, more concerned with the maintenance of the status quo, which has served the "greens" well. They are currently the "big families" of Anjouan, and although they are now the leaders of UDC, until 1970 they were only the supporters of Dr. Sheikh, who was from Grand Comoro. The current UDC leader, Ahmed Abdallah of Anjouan, is President of the Governing Council. He is strongly pro-French, but now sees independence as a political necessity, and is determined not to let it get out of hand. His model of independence-relationship with France is along the lines of that established pre-1972 by Madagascar. He fears any French attempt to cut Comoros off as she did Guinea. In his speech before the French Senate in 1970, Ahmed Abdallah

25 These terms have nothing to do with race or colour, but refer to the colour of the ballots used by the largely illiterate electorate. They can be best understood in historical perspective. The followers of Dr. Sheikh on Anjouan used the green ballots. The traditional elite of Grand Comoro (the Sheikh group's counterpart) used white ballots, as did their allies on Anjouan, the PSDC. For an account of the developments of the political party system, see P. DeCraene's article in Le Monde, April 1971.

26 The UDC leadership is more or less synonymous with the current Governing Council. After Ahmed Abdallah, President of the Governing Council, the second most important UDC politician is probably Said Attoumane, Minister of Interior, who has been taking charge of the Presidency when Ahmed Abdallah travels.
took the frank position that although Comorians wanted to remain with France, the meagreness of French aid places Comorian politicians who defend this idea in an "extremely difficult situation". He stated further:

You well know, Mr. Minister [of T.O.M. and D.O.M.?] that several parties have been created in Comoros, one for the status quo [UDC?] another for independence [PASOCO and RDPC?] the third for departmentalisation [MM?]. Which will have the majority some day? No one can know, but you have put us [UDC] in an impossible situation.27

The party system reflects inter-island rivalry as well. That part of Grand Comoro elite that was not in control, the "whites", tried to resist UDC preponderance of power in territorial affairs by gaining support in the other three islands. They eventually controlled Mohéli, had formed a working alliance with the Mahori Movement, and had identified allies on Anjouan among those who were for some reason (usually personal) alienated by the "greens" there. Their basis of success was certainly not the slight ideological differences between themselves and the "greens", but rather the fear of domination by Grand Comoro.

The third major party, UMMA (an Arabic word meaning "the people") is perhaps the most difficult of all to understand, and the most typical of the basic thesis that Comorian traditional political parties are merely personal alliances between individuals tied together by their own shared distrust of other individuals. Its current leader, former President and RDPC head, Prince Said Ibrahim, is one of the most important feudal landlords on Grand Comoro. Along with several followers, he split with RDPC—probably in order to be in a position to offer either group a coalition if this was necessary in order to form a government. Then Said Ibrahim's splinter party was joined by Ali Sohili, a younger reformist whose policy outlooks are perhaps the most socialist of any member of the three traditional political parties. Sohili was leader of a group called Mranda, a collection of reform-oriented younger politicians. It is impossible to take seriously the prospects of such a union as UMMA. There is even one line of thought which holds that UMMA was formed by Said Ibrahim after the influence of the Gaullist Jacques Foccart, Secretary-General for the African and Malgache (francophone) Community, in an attempt to salvage influence for France through a "swing" party.

Among the political parties that do not merit the label "traditionalistic", the oldest in MOLINACO (National Liberation Movement of the Comoros), which was formed in 1962 by Comorian intellectuals living in the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam. There were several locations which could have witnessed such a development, as Comorians have emigrated for years in search of work, and large Comorian communities exist in the northern cities of Madagascar (Majunga, Diego Suarez), on Reunion, in Seychelles, in Mombasa and in Dar es Salaam.28 But the founding of the MOLINACO in Dar es Salaam proved to be fortuitous because by 1965 Tanzania was taking a leading role in the development of a radical stance toward liberation of the remain-

28 P. DeCraene, Le Monde, 1 and 2 December 1972.
ing colonial territories. The permanent office of the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee was located in Dar, and the Tanzanian Government has been a continual source of aid to MOLINACO and other liberation movements. The OAU has also been useful, for example, during the internal crisis within MOLINACO which occurred during 1970-1971, when a radical youth wing tried to gain control of the party to turn it toward active and militant tactics to oust the French from the Comoros. The Secretary-General, Abdou Bakari Boina weathered this storm, and with his handful of fellow organisers, seems to have embarked on a new approach.

Until 1967, little was done by MOLINACO inside the Comoros, perhaps because of the ineffectiveness of French control. MOLINACO was purely an expatriate party, and efforts were concentrated on organising branches in Madagascar and Reunion, and in recruiting financial aid, mostly from the OAU and the USSR. Since that time it has become much more active through agents in the Islands, and through two parties that have been formed locally to represent its views. March 1968 saw a demonstration at the secondary school in Moroni, and MOLINACO is generally credited with causing these events.

In August 1969, a group of young people, mostly students, formed PASOCO (Socialist Party of the Comoros) to attempt to spread the message of independence and socio-economic reform in the islands. This party has had a hard time with the authorities who think of it primarily as communist-inspired and tactically violent. PASOCO was also subject to internal dissensions. In 1971 the PASOCO treasurer, Ali Abdallah Himidi, switched to the conservative UDC, in what was certainly a remarkably facile intellectual manoeuver. He now serves in the Chamber as the elected UDC member from the ninth arrondissement.

Until June 1971, Boina's group in Dar es Salaam officially considered PASOCO their “arm” in the islands. Several trends then coincided to convince MOLINACO that a change of tactics was called for. First of all, PASOCO had failed to gain instant popularity. Second, Boina had by this time overcome

29 MOLINACO's account of the following incident gives an idea of the nationalists' difficulties:

The group of militants operating within the country always faced the greatest hardship. Several of them were arrested in 1968 following a demonstration of students of Moroni Secondary School against French domination. The Comorians protested against Colonial abuses and dehumanization practices of the French administrators. They were clamouring for "respect", "self-determination" and "human equality" as in the United Nations Charter which was signed by France among other nations. A total of over 300 appeared before the court, some were sent for 50 years in closed prisons while others were deported from the islands for 10 years. Important names among the lot were Aberehman Ahmed and Abdillahi Ali Hassan, The French lawyer (they were not allowed to make use of the services of lawyers other than French) Maurice Buttin, of the Appeal Court in Paris, who appeared in Court for the accused was tricked by AIR COMORES—a French company operating air services to the Comores—who changed the itinerary of their services so that Mr. Buttin would not catch his flight from Dar es Salaam to Moroni. He was flying from Paris, and although he missed the Air Comores flight he did manage to get to Moroni in time for the trial. MOLINACO had to charter a plane from TIM AIR in Dar es Salaam to Moroni. Had Mr. Buttin not gone on the chartered flight the case would have been conducted in Moroni in his absence.

*The People*, 15 November 1972, p. 11.
more radical opposition within his party. Third, the shape of post-Sheikh Comorian Government was proving more pragmatic and less conservative, as politicians dared to voice more openly their dissatisfaction with French rule.

As a result, in 1972, the Party for the Evolution of the Comoros (PEC) was formed, and this group has proven capable of hiding its dislike of the traditional parties while supporting their growing feeling that the Comoros can do better economically as an independent country. PEC forms a part of the new "union" which must now be described.

Cooperation between the RDPC (and Anjouan allies, the PSDC) and the UDC has become very close. Since the UDC has moved toward slightly less traditionalistic and anti-reformist positions during the past two years, the cooperation between the two parties has culminated with the formation in September 1972 of the Union for the Evolution of the Comoros. It would be premature at this point to call this Union a political party. Although leaders of both the traditional parties that formed the bulk of the Union insist that it has in fact replaced the older individual parties, and that their central committees have been merged, it would be more correct to label the Union an electoral alliance. This is particularly true when it is recognised that the PEC and other more radical reformist elements have joined the Union. It remains to be proven how much longer such a diverse alliance can last. Certainly the most that can be said for the prospects for continued unity is that the Union's diverse participants share a desire, whatever their various reasons, for greater independence from France. But it is important not to lose sight of the fact that most participants in the Union have only joined the independence issue recently, that their differences are of much longer standing, and that these would be likely to emerge afresh after independence, perhaps even exacerbated by the spoils of power. Although even MOLINACO leaders have recently greeted and worked cordially with the "mainstream" politicians, their perspectives on UDC and RDPC cannot have changed greatly. Perhaps with tongue in cheek, MOLINACO's present view on UDC now is that "It used to be regarded by nationalists as a puppet party".

One final political party remains to be described: the Mahorin Movement (MM) of Mayotte. Member and foe alike insist that it is not really a political party at all; but it shares all the definitional features of one. For many years Mayotte was the most advanced of the Comoro Islands economically, and was the centre of French administration. Then, as the elites of the larger populations of Anjouan and Grand Comoro became more active under the French control, power shifted to those islands, leaving Mayotte (and, as always, 30 Conversation with Minister of Interior, Said Attoumane, 2 May 1973.
32 The People, 15 November 1972, p. 11. See also, the enlightening comment by the Tanzanian journalist, Musa Kibasi: "Independence for the Comoro people is now a question of time. MOLINACO will then have to press for economic independence. It will have to introduce urgent land reforms. "A Chameleon Called France," Daily News (Dar es Salaam) 5 December 1972. See also the official Tanzania Government statement on the Comorian elections, 1 December 1972.
33 During the last election MM used the title "Union for the Defense of the Interests of Mayotte".
Mohéli) in the backwash. Under the regime of Dr. Said Mohamed Sheikh, the capital was moved from Dzaoudzi, Mayotte, to Moroni, Grand Comoro, an event that has proven of supreme significance in the political development of Mayotte. The Mahoris feel that their island has been badly neglected even in the context of comparative overall neglect of all the Comoros. Mahori leaders talk about the dismantling of the refineries to process their sugar and of other resources they have been denied over the decades. As anyone who has braved the Hotel le Rocher can attest, the tourist industry is by-passing the island. Radio Comoros has been moved to Grand Comoro, too.

The removal of the capital was the most important of these blows. Symptomatic of the political consciousness it created is the relative over-development of the political role of women which can be observed in Mayotte. The MM has been very skilful in mobilising the economic impact of the loss of the many domestic work positions that are no longer available. One of the party's leaders, Madame Zaina N'dere, has been responsible for seeing that every Mayotte village has one cell leader, frequently a woman, who keeps track of the party's fortunes there.

Current tactics of the MM are to emphasise the differences between Mayotte and the other islands, and to lean on French desires to keep some position of influence in the Indian Ocean at a time when things have not been going France's way. Marcel Henri and other MM leaders support their claims to continued French protection by pointing out that they welcomed the French Foreign Legion Garrison that has long been stationed at “the Rock” on one of Mayotte's smaller islands; that their giant lagoon is capable of serving as an anchorage for the French area fleet; and that, besides, of the Comorian peoples, the Mahoris are least enslaved to Islam, most Europeanised (the Henri family is franco-Malgach and Catholic) and most economically viable if only some attention were given to their problems. Further on the subject of Mahori tactics, one must mention a series of violent events, the worst in October 1969, that at least twice have resulted in fatalities. During the December 1972 elections, for example, MM “goon squads” apparently entered villages where immigrants from Anjouan and Grand Comoro are concentrated and intimidated them from voting.

The Mahoris clearly bank on the possibility that the French really do care what happens to their part of the Indian Ocean and therefore wish to keep some position of influence there. France has on occasion encouraged them to feel that way. In November 1970, Minister of T.O.M. and D.O.M., Henry

34 Karrim Essak argues that this condition was general throughout the Comoros, where French policy has been directed toward the positive destruction of Comorian industry. Using data probably provided by MOLINACO, he argues, for example, that between 1844 and 1905 all fourteen sugar factories were dismantled, Daily News (Dar es Salaam) 16 October 1972.

35 For example, during the visit by the French High Commissioner to Mayotte in March 1973. For a statement of the Mahori view, see the speech by the Mahori member of the Comoros Chamber of Deputies, Younoussa Bomana, on the occasion of the visit by the French Minister of D.O.M. and T.O.M., November 1970, to Mayotte. Promo al Camar, November 1970, pp. 7-8.

36 Info-Comores, 2 March 1973, p. 3; also cites “incidents” on 19 and 20 February 1973.
Ray, scolded the Mahoris for their problems of "morale": they had allowed the removal of a few offices to upset them but they should recognise the inherent richness of their island. But only one year ago, Pierre Messmer, Ray's successor, assured the Mahoris that there would be no independence without allowing the populations of each island to rule by referendum on their political futures. During early 1973, Marcel Henri, Abdullah Houmadi and perhaps others from Mayotte made plans to attend the Paris deliberations of May-June to remind Messmer, now Prime Minister, of his year-old promise.

To emphasise their displeasure with the increasing domination of Territorial affairs by the other islands, although somewhat destructive to their own position perhaps, the Mahoris are pursuing a policy of boycott. The present Cabinet includes nobody from Mayotte. According to the Government, a minister from Mayotte "will be designated in agreement between the parties of the Union and interested Mahoris". It is not clear whether Ahmed Abdallah's Government intends to wait patiently for the MM leaders to accept the unity of the islands, or whether they will actively seek other Mahoris who sympathise with that position. From the President's recent statements and from past speeches, it would appear that he has little patience with Marcel Henri's group, and some reservations about the French intentions as well. As a Senator, Abdallah once indicated his suspicions in a remarkably candid speech to the French Senate:

It seems surprising to me, to say the least, that at the moment when all the giant powers are sharpening their penetration of the Indian Ocean, France seems to wish to renounce her well established position in the Comoros, the strategic importance of which is evident, and is driving us little by little to seek Independence. This French state of mind may be mere unconsciousness, but many Comorians think France is preparing another contrivance. That would consist of setting up one island, Mayotte, as a French Department and abandoning the other three to their own ends.

Events have clearly not been moving in the Mahori Movement's favour, and will continue in that direction unless France now decides to separate Mayotte from the other islands, Inter-island migration has filled whole villages on Mayotte with people from over-crowded Anjouan and Grand Comoro. This migration is perfectly legal, but MM leaders feel that it is being unjustly stimulated by politicians on the two big islands. The election data in Tables 3 and 4 indicate one impact on these movements. It is significant that Mayotte had the highest non-voting rate of the four islands. This is partly explained by unrest around villages that have many more immigrants from other islands. There were more than nineteen per cent of the people on Mayotte who were unhappy with MM's message, and in future elections the "hand shakers" (as the MM derisively call those from the other parties who stress Comorian
### Table 3—Results of the Election of 3 December 1972 for the Comoros Chamber of Deputies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
<th>Valid Votes Cast Number and % of reg.</th>
<th>Pro 'Union' (UDC, RDPC, PEC &amp; allies)</th>
<th>UMMA</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Comoro</td>
<td>70,749</td>
<td>54,574 77</td>
<td>39,777 72 'Union'</td>
<td>13,021 23</td>
<td>1776† 3†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohéli</td>
<td>5,562</td>
<td>4,216 75</td>
<td>2,409 57 'Union'</td>
<td>1,231 29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjouan</td>
<td>36,330</td>
<td>34,178 94</td>
<td>34,178 100 (PASO) CO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayotte</td>
<td>16,428</td>
<td>11,885 72</td>
<td>2,351 19 (UJPM)</td>
<td>9,534 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


†Front Patriotique Unie (?).
Table 4—Results of the Election of 4 March 1973 for the French Republic’s Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
<th>Votes Cast (all for uncontested unity slate)</th>
<th>% participated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Comoro</td>
<td>76,383</td>
<td>62,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohéli</td>
<td>5,914</td>
<td>5,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjouan</td>
<td>36,965</td>
<td>34,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayotte</td>
<td>16,272</td>
<td>4,347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


unity) will do successively better. A Mayotte-based party, UJPM (Union of Youth for the Progress of Mayotte) advocates Unity with the other islands and Independence. The French model of administration will, in practice, further this trend. The Prefect of Mayotte, M. Abdouraquib, and the economic adviser, Ahmed Soilih, are examples of “pro-unity and independence” officials who serve to undermine the MM position. It may be that these efforts are already beginning to bear fruit; the March elections for the French National Assembly (Table 4) show 28 per cent of Mayotte voters supporting the Unity candidate. In any case, this electoral arithmetic will mean little as long as France stays with her decision to give in to the dominant international and Comorian pressures to give the four islands independence only as a single unit. The agreement signed on 15 June 1973 takes a leisurely view of progress towards independence, but the promised referendum will not, according to the accord, allow a single island to opt for continued dependence on France. It seems apparent that the Comoros will become independent soon, and the Mahori cause is lost.

40 One must note here that MM has benefited in the past from a favourable French press, notably in the person of Le Monde’s P. DeCraene, whose articles have “stressed the positives” of the Mahori position.


42 See also P. DeCraene’s account of activities of Moslem holy men who argue that MM is subverting the correct domestic role of women, Le Monde, 1 and 2 December 1973.

43 On the prospects of international uproar should France decide to “hive off” Mayotte as an Indian Ocean base, see Daily News (Dar es Salaam), 16 October 1972.