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NIC MACLELLAN

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NEW CALEDONIA

Political tensions in early 2011 came close to unraveling the “collegial” institutions put in place by the Noumea Accord of 1998, as the governing cabinet fell four times, until a new alliance emerged between leading loyalist and pro-independence parties. When local governance had seemed to stabilize, tragic intercom-

munal violence erupted on the island of Maré just before the Pacific Games began in Noumea. The year finished with heated controversy over a cinematic representation of the dramatic battle on Ouvéa in 1988, which had resulted in the negotiated Matignon peace accord that same year. 2011 was a year of testing and reflection, but at the territorial level, centrist loyalists and leftist independence supporters found themselves outmaneuvered by a “national” coalition that aimed to negotiate its way toward a consensual end of the Noumea Accord era, with or without a successful referendum on independence in 2014. The autonomous, sui generis country still lacks an official status in the French system of overseas territories.

Last year, as a committee was deliberating about local identity symbols, key political leaders decided to raise two flags over public buildings in preparation for the 2011 Pacific Games: that of France and that of Kanaky (the country name preferred by the pro-independence movement). Many people saw this conciliatory gesture as a breakthrough because loyalists had regarded the Kanaky flag as a “terrorist” emblem in the violent 1980s. Ironically, Pierre Frogier of the right-wing loyalist Rassemblement party had proposed it, and Paris and several Kanak nationalist parties (most notably the Union Calédonienne, or UC) supported the idea. But four local mayors—most of whom were connected to the reigning centrist loyalist party, Calédonie Ensemble (Caledonia Together, or CE)—refused to raise both flags together. The fourth mayor, on the outer island of Maré, resented the dominant independence coalition, the

Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS). Tempers rose particularly after the La Foa municipal council voted 15–2 not to raise the Kanaky flag on 12 January 2011, a day when independence supporters commemorated the killing by French police snipers of FLNKS hero Eloi Machoro in 1985 near La Foa (NC, 13 Jan 2011). The CE had taken a stand in 2010 in favor of creating a single flag for the country, in accordance with its reading of the Noumea Accord, so it refused to accept the Kanaky flag as a collective symbol. Palika (Parti de Libération Kanak)—the second largest pro-independence party, which is a leftist rival of the church- and chief-based UC—agreed with the single flag quest (NC, 31 Jan 2011), having already flown the two flags together in the Northern Province since 1988.

UC President Charles Pidjot issued an ultimatum to the four recalcitrant mayors to raise the Kanaky flag alongside the French tricolor, or else he and his party colleagues in the congressional executive (referred to locally as the government) would resign, thereby triggering a new cabinet election. This provision in the 1999 organic laws that had enacted the Noumea Accord had been used several times before when minority members felt that the majority was not respecting collegial consensus. But the current cabinet president, Philippe Gomès of the CE, said that if the UC forced the issue, his party too would resign as soon as a new government was formed in order to defend the democratic right of municipal councils to refuse to raise the Kanaky flag. Critics saw the flag issue as a pretext to enable the

Rassemblement and the UC to displace the CE and Palika from dominating the government (NC, 15 Feb 2011). On 18 February, the UC duly resigned from the cabinet, forcing a new election of the executive by Congress within fifteen days. Frogier and Pidjot both described their parties as “historical signers” of the peace accords of 1988 and 1998, whereas Gomès and most of his followers were not (though Palika was). The RUMP (Rassemblement-Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, the UMP being the metropolitan party of French President Nicolas Sarkozy) and the UC said they wanted to work together to “turn a page of history” by negotiating the approaching exit from the Noumea Accord era. Frogier declared, “For 23 years . . . we have always known not to go too far. We have sufficiently suffered to know that there is a yellow line not to cross. To cross it, is to risk returning to unhappy episodes.” But Gomès called the new alliance a conspiracy to impose an outcome “behind the backs” of the voters, and he began street demonstrations in favor of a single, new country flag (NC, 20 Feb 2011). Palika too criticized the “exclusive” RUMP-UC alliance for being “against nature,” since the Rassemblement and the UC had been staunch political opponents in the late 1970s and 1980s (NC, 28 Feb 2011).

In early March, Congress elected a new cabinet, with Harold Martin of the small Avenir Ensemble (Future Together, or AE) party as president; like the RUMP, the AE is tied to Sarkozy’s metropolitan Gaullist party. The UC won the vice presidency from Palika, and altogether pro-independence parties won five out of eleven

ministries, the most ever, as the two largest parties voted in tandem. But Gomès’s CE immediately resigned, calling the RUMP-UC coalition a political and institutional “putsch” against the Noumea Accord’s proposal of seeking a consensual “common destiny.” He demanded a new election of the entire Congress. Frogier replied, “We must find, with our pro-independence partners, a solution accepted by the largest number [ie, a majority], to build a New Caledonia largely autonomous, with its personality, in the bosom of the French Republic . . . the French flag is our flag and no one can replace it” (NC, 3 March 2011). His proposal to fly both flags clearly validated, in his mind, not only Kanak identity but also a continuing French presence, whereas Gomès wanted to nurture a distinctive Caledonian citizenry that fused French, Asian, and Polynesian settlers with Kanak through social-democratic programs that aimed to overcome colonial inequities by better managing the country’s resources. The UC, however, called Gomès “capricious” and dictatorial and asked Paris not to allow another cabinet election. Critics compared the cabinet crisis to the frequent presidential elections in French Polynesia since 2004, as two or three party leaders rotated through the presidency there whenever a few assembly members switched sides to obtain better administrative posts (NC, 5 March 2011; PIR, 2 June 2011). The UC suddenly proposed that the Kanaky flag be made, by default, the new country flag, since non-Kanak lacked one of their own, though the CE had created a website for suggestions. Frogier’s RUMP declined this UC gambit but also condemned pro-single-flag

street demonstrations for “crossing the yellow line” into disorder (NC, 15 March 2011).

A second Martin-led cabinet was elected that same month, retaining the same 6–5 ratio of loyalists to independence parties, but the CE resigned yet again (NC, 18 March 2011). Sylvain Pabouty of Palika (which in the populous, multiethnic Southern Province is allied with the UC) said that the indigenous Kanak people had endured a French imperialist flag for 150 years, so why not have the Kanaky flag for the same amount of time? (MNP, 26 March 2011). Rock Wamytan of the UC-South accused Gomès of flirting with extremist malcontents, including the former National Front, which had lost all its seats in Congress in the 2009 election due to restrictions on voting rights to long-term residents. The small Labor Party (Parti Travailleiste, linked to the leftist, pro-independence Union Syndicaliste des Travailleurs Kanak et Exploités, or USTKE), which works with the UC in coordination with the RUMP, called Gomès’s tactics a “pied-noirization” of local politics (Gomès is descended from former European settlers of Algeria known as *pieds noirs*, or black feet). The French high commissioner banned street protests for the time being, because the flag issue was arousing deep emotions among settler and Kanak factions (NC, 27 March, 31 March 2011).

Meanwhile, Wamytan, a former president of the UC and the FLNKS, was elected president of the Congress in April, the first Kanak independence supporter to hold that office in thirty-four years (MNP, 3 April 2011). His winning 32 of 54 votes was a clear

RUMP-UC attempt at reconciliation and coordination, though the CE and Palika both boycotted the meeting. As Congress president, Wamytan would shepherd bills through commissions to the floor for voting, and he could delay a new cabinet election. The French government was pushing through its own Parliament a change to the New Caledonian organic laws that would create an eighteen-month grace period for cabinets. In negotiation with local party leaders, France also agreed to expand the membership of the annual Signers Committee meetings to include minority parties, thus recognizing the CE as a legitimate participant. When Gomès contested the first Martin cabinet election on procedural grounds, the French Council of State called for another vote. In June, a third Martin-led cabinet was elected, this time with only 4 seats allocated to pro-independence parties and 3 (rather than 2) to the CE (NC, 2 June 2011). Paul Néaoutyine of Palika and Nidoish Naisseline of the small Libération Kanak Socialiste party (LKS) warned Paris against the “occult dealings” of the RUMP-UC that risked bypassing collegial dialogue with a majority exclusiveness, as in pre-2004 RUMP-led coalition cabinets (NC, 22 May 2011, 2 June 2011). Since 2004, however, the RUMP (and the UC) has complained about CE- and Palika-dominated cabinets, so consensus is elusive.

In August, Wamytan was reelected as Congress president because the Council of State had also invalidated his first election on a technicality (MNP, 23 Aug 2011). As former head of the UC and FLNKS, he was a major actor in the 1998 Noumea Accord

negotiations and shared the cover of *Pacific Islands Monthly* with the late Jacques Lafleur of the Rassemblement as regional Man of the Year. Internal Kanak rivalries then reduced him to a lesser role in the settler-dominated south, though he did serve a term as head of the Melanesian Spearhead Group and remained active in local conflict mediation and environmental protests. Wamytan is the grandson of the last pro-independence leader to lead the territorial assembly, Rock Pidjot, whose chiefly title he inherited. In a country whose indigenous people are today a slight minority, Wamytan countered criticisms of alliance with the RUMP: “We have attained an objective of the FLNKS, to be associated with responsibilities at the highest institutional level of the country. We have always thought that sharing was necessary, because we signed together the Matignon Accord, which was confirmed by the Noumea Accord. We awaited a gesture. . . . But I’m not bound by any contract with [Frogier] . . . Everyone keeps his own convictions, his visions. . . . We do not form a caste, we do not close the door to others” (NC, 4 April 2011). In his first acceptance speech, Wamytan gave a local history lesson and stressed the need to balance “rational” Western thinking with “mythic” indigenous perspectives in pursuit of a holistic, Oceanian consensus: “We’re making the necessary effort to mine the depth of what constitutes our Caledonian soul in its diverse origins, whose sources will permit a promising, better future for our children” (MNP, 3 April 2011). He defended “the independence option,” but, as in Kanak cultural tradition, “opposing groups,

they always managed after conflicts to reach compromises, consensus, paths of cooperation” (MNP, 18 July 2011). Yet the CE, Palika, and LKS boycotts of his own election showed that some parties felt left out.

In July, the now-expanded Signers Committee met in Paris, where French Prime Minister François Fillon assured the local political leaders that both flags would remain alongside each other until a single country flag could be agreed on later. The meeting became more technical after that because the ongoing extrication of Paris from New Caledonia’s governance, as prescribed by the Noumea Accord, involves increasingly complicated institutional details. In fact, participants agreed that French scholarly experts should assist them in planning for better management of the nickel mining and processing industry, transferring specific administrative authority in matters such as education or the judiciary, generating future development contracts using French financial aid, and enhancing the international status of New Caledonia. Of high priority were increased training opportunities in many fields for local residents, better coordination between the local government and the multinational firms that were constructing new processing plants, and efforts to achieve full membership in the Pacific Islands Forum (NC, 11 July 2011). In March, France paid for an academic conference in Noumea, where scholars from around the world described diverse forms of self-government in former colonies, and Martin and Wamytan welcomed such advice for comparative perspectives. In particular, two speakers recommended that

the “reserved” powers still controlled by France, such as defense, foreign relations, currency, police, and the courts, which a successful referendum on sovereignty could delegate to the country, should not be treated as sacred, fixed pillars (as many settlers wanted for security) but rather as broad concepts that needed negotiated specificity. Such concrete details might well precede a priori labels of associated state or sovereign independence in a globalized world. Thanks to two negotiated accords after the tragic 1980s, every leader in New Caledonia today is at least an autonomist, favoring a flexible form of self-government whose exact limits long-term residents can decide together (Faberon, Fayard, and Regnault 2011).

In August, a dispute in the Islands Province over airfares to the main island led to organized protests that blockaded outer-island airports and erupted into intercommunal violence on Maré. Nidoish Naisseline, president of the domestic carrier, Aircal, was also high chief of Guahma district, which has often been at odds over land disputes and other issues with people of the La Roche district, which had shut down the local airport. At a wedding between a couple drawn from each of the opposing groups, alcohol brought out deep antagonisms, so an armed attempt to reopen the airport caused shootings and pillage in Tadine. Four people died and two dozen were wounded, so the French flew in more than a hundred police and soldiers to stop looting, lift roadblocks, and make arrests, while church and customary leaders pursued peace-making mediation (NC, 9 Aug 2011). Ten days later, a negoti-

ated protocol addressed what Islands Province residents felt was a need for rebalancing, since they needed affordable transportation to the main island, where most jobs were located because of the nickel industry. Aircal faced financial and management problems and tried to raise fares by 30 percent to enable it to restructure, but outer islanders wanted subsidized airfares. One elder compared the new protocol to the Matignon and Noumea peace accords because it provided for representatives of Aircal passengers on its administrative board (NC, 18 Aug 2011). Naisseline, who had wanted more provincial control over Aircal (New Caledonia is the majority shareholder) but had already clashed with labor unions, was removed from the congressional transport commission and from the presidency of the provincial economic development commission. In response, he said, “You don’t need to bring a guillotine to cut off my head” (NC, 21 Oct 2011).

Later that month, French President Sarkozy visited Noumea, in part to help open the Pacific Games. He met with local leaders and condemned the Maré violence as going against all the progress toward consensual solutions in the country. He promised to enforce security: “New Caledonia has often provided the best, and sometimes the worst, example.” He vowed that France would remain “a loyal partner, nonpartisan and ready to accompany the territory in its emancipation, technically and financially.” The future status of the country was for local people to decide, though he personally preferred to keep them in the republic. He was pleased that the two former oppositional blocs

were changing and praised Lafleur and Jean-Marie Tjibaou for “opening a path” in their Matignon Accord handshake a generation earlier. He supported the “affirmative action” of “rebalancing” economic development among the three provinces, supported the two flags temporarily as a gesture of reconciliation, agreed with Gomès that remaining social inequalities still needed addressing, hoped with Wamy-tan that New Caledonia could obtain full Forum membership, and accepted the idea of a local Caledonian citizenship, since France had both its own citizenship and that within the European Union (NC, 27 Aug 2011).

New Caledonia won the most medals at the Games, including 120 golds compared to 59 for Tahiti and 49 for Papua New Guinea, thus continuing its domination of the south Pacific in many sports (PIR, 12 Sept 2011). But an interesting subtext arose when the symbolic flame was brought ashore on Ouvea in the Islands Province. A Samoan carried it to the local chief, reenacting what his ancestors had done when they migrated there in ancient times and married into a local clan. Some Ouvea residents felt it also reopened relations with the anglophone Pacific, which dated back to the arrival of Polynesian missionaries in the 1840s but had been cut off by French colonialism and especially by the 1988 battle for independence (NC, 18 July 2011; Waddell 2008). In other regional relations, the FLNKS traveled to a Suva meeting of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, of which it has been a member since 1991, to discuss lingering social inequalities and the Kanak Customary Senate’s need for a real political voice (NC, 31 March

2011). New Caledonia also asked to be a full member of the Pacific Islands Forum, after becoming the first French territory to become an observer in 1999 and then an associate member in 2006, but its request was denied again until more progress is made toward self-government (PIR, 25 May 2011; NC, 10 Sept 2011). French officials traveled to Tonga to examine its state institutions and to Fiji to study ways to combine traditional land tenure with development (PIR, 25 July, 27 Sept 2011). James Anaya of the United Nations Decolonization Committee praised the devolution of governing powers to the country under the Noumea Accord, but he criticized socioeconomic inequalities, underrepresentation of Kanak in institutions, and slow progress toward an act of self-determination (MNP, 15 Feb, 27 June 2011).

In September, elections for two seats in the French Senate in Paris (New Caledonia was formerly allocated only one seat) resulted in victories after two rounds of voting for Frogier and Hilarion Vendegou, the mayor of the Isle of Pines, whose chief was the first to sign a treaty of French annexation in 1853. The election results perpetuated the monopoly of legislative representation in Paris by the RUMP. The UC and Palika would not ally in the second round to support an FLNKS candidate, but Frogier attributed his success to the gesture of raising both flags that brought his party and the UC together. The CE failed to win a seat, repeating its frustration in the 2007 elections for deputies to the French National Assembly, despite its hope to compete with the RUMP in Paris. Its candidates

blamed the senatorial election system, which instead of universal suffrage empowers a small group of urban “great electors,” at least until a reform planned for 2013 (NC, 26 Sept 2011). But Gomès continued to rally smaller parties around the CE, which together claimed to represent 25,000 voters (NC, 21 Dec 2011).

In November, government President Martin applauded the end of cabinet instability, which he said enabled a calm quest for a consensual outcome of the Noumea Accord process, though the CE boycotted his speech. New cooperation among loyalists and independence supporters had made Wamytan president of Congress, he argued, and cabinet Vice President Gilbert Tyuienon of the UC had been able to tell the United Nations, “New Caledonia, leaving aside majority-minority logic, has decided to go beyond ideological oppositions by installing a new method of governance based on a sharing of power in the country’s institutions.” Martin stated three main goals: reducing inequalities, combating the high cost of living (which unions have protested about), and improving job access for local citizens through a combination of government regulation and business competition. The French state would help enforce security against rising juvenile delinquency and increase New Caledonian ownership of mining projects, while local government would improve access to affordable housing to counter rising squatter camps (NC, 29 Nov 2011). In December, the government, employers, and labor unions finally agreed on criteria to promote local hiring as much as possible, a key measure of local citizenship, along

with restricting voting rights in referendums and provincial elections to long-term residents.

In New Caledonia, 84 percent of employees have resided in the country for at least ten years, but half of the types of jobs that exist may be given to an applicant of shorter residence—the required duration depending on specialization—with approval from a government commission if a local search has not succeeded. Significant efforts will also be made to provide local aspirants with needed skills, including scholarships for study abroad (NC, 24 June, 17 Dec 2011). One of the major undertakings of the Gomès presidency was a country-wide “great debate” about improving education, but under the Martin cabinet, the resulting recommendations were discussed in-house rather than in public (NC, 11 April 2011). The need for reform is serious, because 42 percent of local job applicants lack sufficient qualifications, and almost 30 percent are younger than twenty-six years old (NC, 28 April 2011). This has resulted in rising problems of delinquency and alcohol or marijuana abuse. By province, the populous, multiethnic South still commands 68.6 percent of employment offers, though in the Kanak-ruled North, the Koniambo nickel project has helped to raise job offers to 31.1 percent, while the resource-poor, Kanak-ruled Islands offer less than 1 percent of jobs (NC, 25 Feb 2011). Half the population receives only one-fifth of the total income, and great disparities occur in Noumea, the capital, between “Oceanian” and “white” neighborhoods. So many people migrate to the South that it now contains 75 percent

of the total population, and it has switched from building more housing to providing water and electricity to squatter camps (NC, 25 March, 30 Aug, 21 Nov 2011).

Kanaky/New Caledonia's political leadership has shifted power to its two largest, once opposing, parties for the final push to self-government, but other parties remain in the Congress and the provincial assemblies and are proportionally represented in the cabinet. Pro-independence groups hold 43 percent of the seats in Congress, while an ethnic poll shows that Kanak remain the largest self-identified community at 40 percent. Europeans are 30 percent, and another 30 percent are "others," including Polynesians, Asians, mixtures of the races, and 5 percent who declared themselves simply "Caledonian" (NC, 20 Feb 2011). But old memories continue to haunt them, even as a younger generation that never experienced the violent 1980s or earlier decolonization struggles seeks to understand why history matters in the would-be country. In July, new information surfaced about the location of the skull of Chief Atai, the leader of the largest Kanak revolt in 1878, who was killed by indigenous allies of the French and decapitated. After years of official evasion, the skull and a casting of its face are apparently in a Paris museum after all, and descendants of Atai organized to have the artifacts returned as an act of reconciliation (NC, 7 July, 24 Dec 2011). Emmanuel Tjibaou, son of martyred UC-FLNKS leader Jean-Marie, became head of the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center (NC, 15 July 2011), and in September, family and friends of UC Secretary-

General Pierre Declercq commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of his still unsolved murder in 1981 (NC, 19 Sept 2011). Most controversial was the showing of Mathieu Kassovitz's film *L'Ordre et la Morale* (translated in English as *Rebellion*), which depicts the Ouvea battle of 1988, whose bloodshed finally led to the Matignon Accord. Since its inception, the cinematic project has had both support and opposition from various groups in New Caledonia, such that it had to be filmed in French Polynesia instead of Ouvea even though local actors, including family members, from that island participated. Competing polemics about the film began even before it was released, and at first a local cinema chain canceled its showings after threats (Maclellan 2011). But in December, spectators packed various venues to see it. They emerged with differing opinions, as some had even refused to watch it, but younger people especially seemed to be glad it was made. One said, "It makes us want to know more, to speak with others, to see it again." Another said, "The common destiny, it's a very nice word, but the young generation who doesn't know their history cannot move forward" (NC, 16 Dec 2011).

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PAPUA

The year 2011 in the provinces of Papua and West Papua was politically noisy. Papua occupied the headlines of a number of national electronic and print media sources more often than in the previous year. First, the cycle of violence conducted by both the state apparatus and non-state armed groups predominated. On one side, the management of politics and security in the provinces was still colored by state repression and alleged human rights violations. Impunity was maintained and laws could not be enforced, as law enforcers often failed to indicate the perpetrators' identity, calling them "unknown actors." When perpetrators who are members of state security institutions have been identified and known publicly, the court has tended to punish them with light sentences. On the other side, the non-state armed groups became more aggressive. The year saw more members of the police and military becoming victims of attacks by the Free Papua Movement

(Organisasi Papua Merdeka [OPM])–National Liberation Army (Tentara Pembebasan Nasional [TPN]).

Second, the political impasse caused by mutual mistrust between the government and the pro-independence Papuans continued. The special autonomy law implemented in 2001 has failed to restore trust. The impasse is mainly due to independence demands being approached from the perspective of a security framework (securitization). Most of the government's recent policies were also influenced by the securitization policy, which further undermined the spirit of reconciliation embedded in the special autonomy law.

Third, industrial relations conflicts between workers and the Freeport Indonesia mine intensified. The root of the conflict is wages, which are considered the lowest in relation to other Freeport companies outside Indonesia. A phenomenal strike of the workers' association lasted roughly six months, and the company was forced to halt its operations for about one month. The strike began in July, and negotiations for a new wage structure were concluded at the end of December 2011. The strike ended and the workers enjoyed a wage increase of 37 percent. It was a Christmas gift for both sides.

Fourth, the political will of the government to employ peaceful means of solving the Papua conflict appeared more clearly at the end of the year. On 9 November 2011, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono stated that the government was prepared to hold open dialogue with Papuan leaders. This statement confirmed the previous policy in which the president appointed special envoys