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NEW CALEDONIA

This year was a potential turning point in the decolonization of New Caledonia. The Noumea Accord of 1998 said that the country could hold a referendum on independence in 2014, and the provincial elections of May 2009 produced a Congress empowered to call for that referendum. The country already has a “double” federal relationship with France, as its three provinces have some autonomy from the territory, which in turn continues to receive more self-governing powers from Paris. France itself is integrated into the European Union, so the status of New Caledonia in some ways resembles that of a chartered town in the old medieval European hierarchy. Since 1986, the United Nations Decolonization Committee has regarded New Caledonia as a non-self-governing territory, yet it looks a bit odd on a list with much smaller, resource-poor entities such as Pitcairn Island, the Caribbean islands, Gibraltar, and the Falklands. New Caledonia has one-fourth of the world supply of nickel,

and though the price per ton suffered almost a 50 percent drop over the past year because of the global economic crisis, the mining-based economy remains capable of sustainable development if the income distribution is better managed.

In this “postcolonial” phase of the country’s history, when the Noumea Accord serves as a kind of interim constitution, the political landscape is divided mainly between those who support full independence and those who want enlarged autonomy (the status quo at this point), much like the situation in French Polynesia.

Unfortunately for the latter, the near-parity of independence and autonomy supporters has caused nine changes in the top leadership in Papeete since 2004, because a few politicians can switch sides and generate motions of no confidence to receive better posts in a new regime. In New Caledonia, Harold Martin of the centrist *Avenir Ensemble* (AE, Future Together) party, which caused a mini-revolution in local politics in 2004, explicitly urged his fellow French loyalists to unite and create a “pact of stability” to avoid a “Tahitian” situation (NC, 7 May 2009). But New Caledonia too has experienced fluctuating divisions on both sides of the political spectrum. Since the Noumea Accord brought increasing self-government, independence and autonomy are separated by concerns among the immigrant majority over economic dependency and security. For most Europeans, Asians, Polynesians, mixed-race people (*métis*), and some Kanak, French citizenship gives them legitimacy and safety, so they often point to signs of instability in neigh-

boring Melanesian countries as object lessons to avoid.

The Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) has been the primary pro-independence force since 1984, when its boycott of provincial elections caused a near civil war. But its two leading coalition members, the older Union Calédonienne (UC) and the Parti de Libération Kanak (Palika), have long been rivals, and only rarely and recently (as in the French legislative elections of 2007) have they campaigned on the same list. Each has tried to claim the FLNKS label, but forming separate electoral lists weakened the Kanak vote so much in the 2004 provincial polls that no FLNKS candidate was elected in the populous, multiethnic Southern Province, despite the presence there of a large Kanak workforce, sometimes called the largest “tribe.” In 2009, the FLNKS list in the South managed to unify under Rock Wamytan, who formerly headed the FLNKS, the UC, and the subregional Melanesian Spearhead Group. Two smaller members of the FLNKS are the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RDO), which is composed of Polynesian migrants from Wallis and Futuna, and the Union Progressiste Mélanésienne (UPM). The small Libération Kanak Socialiste (LKS), led by former radical Nidoish Naisseline, and the new Parti Travailleiste (PT, or Labor Party), an offshoot of a radical labor federation, the Union Syndicaliste des Travailleurs Kanak et Exploités (USTKE), round out the main actors who at least nominally support full independence.

The UC-Palika rivalry has prevented the FLNKS from having a president since 2001, when Wamytan last held

the position. In 2009, after much failed negotiation over unity, the two parties again ran on separate lists in the Kanak-ruled North and Islands provinces (NC, 31 Jan, 18 April 2009). Palika and the PT both support revolutionary socialist independence, but the former has lately promoted peaceful dialogue within established institutions, while the latter’s parent, USTKE, has been the most militant in actions. The FLNKS reminded the public of its accomplishments before the May elections: the acquisition of quasi-autonomous Kanak rule over two out of the three provinces; the reinscription of the country on the UN decolonization list in 1986; and successful negotiations with Paris and the local loyalists in the Matignon-Oudinot and Noumea accords, which yielded economic rebalancing between the multiethnic South and the two Kanak-ruled provinces and also the irreversible transfer of self-governing powers to the country (it had autonomy in the 1950s but France took that away in the 1960s to retain control over nickel mining). The two accords also brought official recognition of the Kanak identity through cultural and linguistic institutional support, land reform, the Customary Senate, the establishment of mining and industrial projects in the Kanak-run North, and the restriction of the electorate to long-term residents in the provincial elections and future referendums (KOL, 30 April 2009). Meanwhile USTKE, led by Gérard Jodar, waged a five-month-long, highly disruptive protest against domestic carrier Air Calédonie (Aircal) over the firing of an employee. The strike became a symbol to younger radicals of colonial repression, and it

also pitted USTKE against Naisseline, the president of Aircal (NC, 20 May 2009), whose defense of company policy won support from a wide range of civil associations and political parties.

But if the FLNKS remained divided, so did the loyalists. In 2004, centrists became more prominent (as they had been in the early 1980s and mid-1990s), challenging the Gaullist (French nationalist) “politics of fear” and adopting a social democratic approach to New Caledonia’s inequalities (as the earlier UC had done in the 1950s). But the 2007 French legislative elections were a major setback for the centrists, as the Gaullists kept all three seats that the country holds in the Parliament in Paris, despite centrist control over the Territorial and Southern Province governments. Nicolas Sarkozy, the Gaullist French president elected that year, forged an alliance between his metropolitan Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) and the local Rassemblement founded by Jacques Lafleur in 1977–78 to oppose Kanak independence; the resulting acronym is RUMP, now headed by conservative firebrand Pierre Frogier. Frogier used momentum from the 2007 elections to divide the AE into a faction led by UMP member Martin and a Calédonie Ensemble (CE) offshoot led by Philippe Gomès. Like Martin, Gomès is more willing to dialogue with pro-independence groups to achieve the “common destiny” proposed by the Noumea Accord. Both the AE and CE seek another negotiated accord on the “exit” from the Noumea Accord, whereas Frogier has called for a referendum in 2014 to “purge” independence from the local

political discourse, claiming that the FLNKS only talked of independence for electoral purposes, since it could never gain a majority of votes in favor of it (NC, 10 April 2009). He questioned “ambiguities” in the accord and insisted on keeping New Caledonia within the French republic. But after the elections, he seems to have been influenced by Lafleur’s call for a consensual solution to avoid the danger (given the 1980s uprising) of a humiliating defeat for the Kanak (NC, 24 April, 26 Oct 2009). Simon Loueckhote, who is still senator to Paris from the time before Frogier displaced Lafleur in the Rassemblement, now ran on the AE list with Martin and Didier Leroux (NC, 30 April 2009).

Almost 900 candidates on twenty-four party lists vied for 76 provincial assembly seats (of whom 54 would proportionally become the Congress). The electorate consisted only of those present in the territory in 1998 or who had ten years residence. That eliminated about 13 percent of voters, though the proportion in Noumea, the capital, was perhaps 25 percent. Long-term residents were considered “citizens” of New Caledonia, unlike the days before the 1980s when new immigrants were able to vote fairly quickly and massive arrivals during a nickel boom pushed the Kanak and other supporters of autonomy to the political margins. In the South, the RUMP won 15 seats, and the AE and CE won a total of 19 seats. Wamytan’s unified FLNKS made a comeback with 4 seats, as did Lafleur’s loyalist Rassemblement pour la Calédonie (RPC) with 2, while the local National Front was eliminated, perhaps showing a shift in local politics (or the

effect of limiting the electorate). In the North, Palika won 9 seats (losing 2), while the UC-FLNKS won 8 (gaining 1), the new PT won 3, and loyalists won only 2 seats. In the Islands, loyalists were eliminated completely for the first time, as the UC won 6 (a gain of 2), against 4 for Palika; the LKS and PT each got 2 seats (NC, 11 May 2009). Together, supporters of independence won 43 percent of the seats in Congress, an impressive showing. If they had united in the election of the territorial cabinet, they might have won 5 out of 11 seats, but they did not and got only four ministries (NC, 12 May 2009). In the Islands, the UC allied with the LKS to back incumbent Neko Hnepeune as provincial president; in the North, Paul Néaoutyine of Palika won the presidency again but now had to share power with the UC; and in the South, Frogier became provincial president as part of a “republican pact” with the centrists (NC, 16 May 2009). Martin became president of the Congress, and Gomès president of the territorial cabinet. While retaining a ministry, Déwé Gorodé of Palika lost her vice presidency of the cabinet to the UC’s Pierre Ngaihoni (PIR, 15 June 2009). The French Council of State invalidated the election results in the Islands due to irregularities (a repeat of 1999), and in the new election held in November, Palika lost all its seats, while the UC and LKS allied again, and the PT took Palika’s seats for a total of 4 (NC, 17 Nov 2009). Loueckhote’s loyalist ticket in the Islands was eliminated, but he managed to get a cabinet seat in the central government via the AE (NC, 12 Nov 2009).

The UC and PT made some gains, but given New Caledonian demo-

graphics, French loyalists retained clear majorities in both the Southern Province and the Congress. Nic Maclellan has aptly asked whether the Noumea Accord process will build a common destiny “for all the communities or will it falter, re-creating the political cleavages that led to violent conflicts in the 1980s?” The country appears headed toward “a form of free association with France” (Maclellan 2009, 11–12). The League of the Rights of Man held three well-attended forums to assess the accord so far. At the first, legal scholar Jean-Yves Faberon called the accord a peace treaty whose compromise text is specific but also prone to rival interpretations. Labeling it a negotiated “treaty” highlighted the absence of one in 1853 when France “took possession” by a decree of Napoleon III; only the Kanak uprising in the 1980s made the consensual accords of 1988 and 1998 feasible. The Noumea Accord privileged Kanak identity through legal recognition for customary law, teaching Kanak languages in schools, creating a Customary Senate and the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, while also transferring significant governing authority, restricting the electorate on key votes, and creating a shared territorial cabinet. But protecting local job hiring, economic rebalancing, and developing country identity symbols are so far unfulfilled (NC, 22 Aug 2009; KOL, 26 Aug 2009). At a second forum, two sociologists reported that many residents felt poorly informed about the accord, most young people rarely discussed it, and life remained culturally segregated. Most people thought increasingly of having their own country, but they were divided

over its exact future status (NC, 27 Sept 2009). At the last forum, speakers represented the three main signers of the accord: settlers, Kanak, and Paris. Gomès evoked “emancipation,” “decolonization,” and the “double legitimacy” of settlers and Kanak in a common destiny. Néaoutyine agreed but voiced concern over continuing immigration and asserted that global interdependence today did not negate the right to independence. French High Commissioner Yves Dassonville promised state support for the “emergence of a citizenship” in a “multiethnic country” (NC, 16 Oct 2009).

In his first presidential address, Gomès promoted “living together” and reiterated the centrists’ social democratic goals of 2004. The RUMP had called that approach too “interventionist” in the past but now accepted it as allied loyalists, because the centrists have continued to outpoll Frogier’s Gaullists. Gomès spoke of keeping one’s word, redistributing the wealth, government management of development, protecting the environment, peaceful dialogue (including with labor unions, as the USTKE strike had ended with Jodar in prison), creating a local citizenship, and a consensual solution to future status, ideally through shared sovereignty with France but with UN consultation. Martin backed Gomès but suggested asking Alain Christnacht, who had helped so much with the previous two accords, to do so again, as the RUMP, UC, and PT still wanted a referendum in 2014 for different reasons (NC, 1 Sept, 2 Sept, 12 Sept 2009). Gomès led a delegation to New York to address the UN Decolonization Committee, citing progress in provincial and ter-

ritorial autonomy and land reform, while FLNKS delegates repeated their concern over immigration and met with the Non-aligned Movement that had helped to put New Caledonia on the decolonization list (NC, 30 Sept, 13 Oct 2009). Gomès also led a delegation to the Copenhagen climate talks, vowing to reduce pollution. The limbo of autonomy status revealed itself when France declined to include Gomès’s team in its own mission to the conference, because New Caledonian mining and processing projects would elevate the country to among the world’s top five producers of carbon dioxide emissions (NC, 5 Nov, 17 Dec 2009). In December, the complex process of transferring authority over secondary education and air and sea transportation from Paris to Noumea was concluded with a unanimous vote in Congress, after obtaining promises of metropolitan financial and technical support, and approval from the French Parliament and Economic and Social Council to pass another “country law” (NC, 1 Dec 2009). That month, Congress passed a law to favor locals in hiring—a restriction that labor unions like USTKE have demanded for a decade, often militantly. But the law made exceptions for jobs that New Caledonians could not easily fill, drawing criticism from some pro-independence parties, who see the basic issue as one of limiting local citizenship to long-term residents (NC, 31 Dec 2009).

In June, as he prepared to visit Martinique and Guadeloupe, where labor unions were on strike to protest the high cost of living, French President Sarkozy promised equality for the overseas territories. He said

that their residents should enjoy the same standard of living as people in the metropolitan republic (PIR, 24 June 2009). He also promised those two *départements* a referendum on expanded self-government (NC, 9 Oct 2009). French public debt is the highest since 1995 because of the global economic crisis (BBC, 30 Dec 2009), but in 2009, France gave twice as much development aid to resource-poor French Polynesia as it did to New Caledonia (NC, 18 May 2009). Maurice Ponga was elected as the French overseas member of the European Parliament, continuing the RUMP's monopoly over representation in Europe, though only 20 percent of New Caledonian voters cast ballots. The country receives US\$14 million over five years from the European Union, compared to US\$2 billion per year from France (PIR, 8 June 2009). Sarkozy planned to head up another France-Pacific Summit in Noumea and to visit Australia promoting regional integration. But he could not make it, so the minister of foreign affairs and the overseas secretary filled in. Two dozen countries from around Oceania sent representatives to hear promises of twice as much French aid money, to talk about climate change amid the smokestacks, and to enjoy the hotels (PIR, 7 May 2009; NC, 28 July, 31 July 2009). A surprise issue that was quickly swept under the diplomatic rug was an accord signed by the FLNKS and the Customary Senate that gave uninhabited Matthew and Hunter islets to Vanuatu, despite French disapproval. Paris and loyalists invoked the "common destiny" idea to protest the interisland deal backed by the Melanesian Spearhead Group

(NC, 27 July 2009; PIR, 28 July 2009). New Caledonia is slated to be France's naval headquarters in the Pacific, supposedly to patrol "French" Exclusive Economic Zones and to fight terror, the postcommunist bogeyman. Meanwhile, Paris has finally agreed to compensate nuclear radiation victims in French Polynesia for its atomic testing there from 1966 to 1996 (PIR, 23 Dec 2009).

The New Caledonian economy has suffered from the world economic crisis, most notably the nickel industry, though tourism remained stagnant at fewer than 100,000 visitors per year, half as many as Fiji despite the latter's military regime (PIR, 24 Nov 2009). The high cost of living has hindered tourism, and ship passengers say that Noumea "has no soul." Not only is it expensive, but most shops are closed between noon and 2 pm, after 6 pm, and on weekends. Efforts to open for longer hours, build shops on the docks, or expand the hospitality industry outside Noumea have not succeeded so far (NC, 20 May, 17 June 2009). Some locals blame the lack of interest in tourism on the mining economy and on French budget subsidies. Agriculture has survived the crisis, at least in ranching and piggeries if not in poultry, but the importation of foods has also increased. Inflation is the highest in ten years (3.7 percent), yet major development projects at Gouaro Deva and Dumbea have continued to create jobs in the South (NC, 24 June, 16 Sept, 9 Dec 2009; PIR, 25 June 2009). The government, pushed by the Union Syndicaliste des Ouvriers et Employés de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (USOENC), has attempted to reduce the cost of living, taking steps such as fix-

ing prices, reducing taxes, regulating mining, and passing importer antitrust laws, and it has also raised the minimum wage in increments (*NC*, 25 Feb, 10 April, 21 Oct 2009). It invests in infrastructure, affordable housing, and job training, with French financial aid and nickel income (*NC*, 25 Feb, 3 April 2009). The loyalists and Palika supported Gomès's nearly US\$2 billion budget in December, backing his social democratic program, while the UC and PT said the budget did not go far enough in helping the rural and urban poor (*NC*, 22 Dec 2009). The once-dominant Société le Nickel (*SLN*) talked of layoffs despite labor protests, but the North continued to build its Koniambo nickel processing and commercial development projects near Koné, the provincial capital, benefiting from its relationship with metal-processor Posco of Korea (*NC*, 21 July, 20 Nov 2009). In the South, the processing plant project at Goro still raised concerns over pollution because of an acid leak, but it was scheduled to begin operations in early 2010. The long disposal pipes into the sea at both Koniambo and Goro have aroused debate over how much pollution is tolerable (*NC*, 27 Nov, 3 Dec 2009).

A new census revealed a population of 245,580, a bit lower than expected. Ethnic data was collected this time, after being banned by French President Jacques Chirac in 2003. It should help to assess the impact of economic rebalancing and speculation about a rising métis element when it becomes available (*NC*, 15 Nov 2009). A census in Wallis and Futuna showed that its population has declined by 10 percent since 2003, while the number of migrants to New Caledonia from

that resource-poor French territory has risen 10 percent, to 25,000 (*PIR*, 27 July 2009). Wallisian immigration had contributed to making the indigenous Kanak a minority in the 1970s and provided hired militias against Kanak militants in the 1980s. Violence erupted again between the communities in 2001, and most Wallisians still vote loyalist out of economic dependency. But Martin negotiated a special accord between the two countries, and this year delegations from Wallis and Futuna engaged in reconciliation ceremonies with Kanak. An exposition at the Tjibaou Cultural Center also promoted mutual understanding between the two communities, and partnerships in local economic development are being pursued (*NC*, 27 July, 9 Dec 2009). Migrants from both Oceanian peoples mingle in the growing squatter camps around Noumea, where their leaders complain of a lack of equal opportunity (*NC*, 23 Dec 2009). Juvenile delinquency among unemployed Oceanians has stirred efforts among civic associations, the police, and the Customary Senate to find solutions such as more positive activities and education in customary values (*NC*, 8 June, 31 Aug 2009). Meanwhile, Kanak commemorated the twentieth anniversary of Tjibaou's death, Gorodé planned for the 2010 Festival of Melanesian Arts in Noumea, and civic and government leaders held the annual 24th of September Citizenship Festival at the Mwâ Kâ totem pole in Noumea despite a boycott by the RUMP (*NC*, 29 April, 8 July, 25 Sept 2009). Museums also educated residents about the shared history of the country in displays of precolonial Kanak

art, the Kanak revolt of 1917, and the graphic art of Bernard Berger, who has tried to promote a sense of common destiny through typically Caledonian humor (NC, 19 Jan, 7 Sept, 22 Sept 2009).

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PAPUA

During 2009, the Papua and West Papua provinces of Indonesia witnessed a number of prominent events that maintained an atmosphere of conflict between the Government of Indonesia and Papuans in general. In cities, secessionist demands were expressed openly in the mass media. In remote highland areas, a number of very low level armed attacks occurred, allegedly conducted by secessionist groups of the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, or OPM);

these included a series of shootings in the concession area of the gigantic Freeport mining company, targeting Freeport employees. Papuan youth and student groups dominated by highlanders became prominent actors in political opposition in 2009. The year closed with the killing of influential OPM leader Kelly Kwalik. The political picture of Papua and West Papua remains generally somber since the implementation of the Special Autonomy law in 2001.

In the media, opinion makers at universities, politicians, and Papuan religious leaders ceaselessly criticized the implementation of the Special Autonomy law. Most feel that very little significant progress has been achieved over the past eight years in addressing the roots of the Papua conflict, such as disputes about history, human rights abuses, failure of development, and most importantly the marginalization of the indigenous Papuans. Despite high budgets for the two provinces, there was little improvement in public services for remote areas, and the already bad image of the Indonesian government in the eyes of Papuans deteriorated further due to corruption on the part of local Papuan bureaucrats. Many prominent Papuan intellectuals have concluded that the Special Autonomy legislation has stagnated, and has failed to function as a “middle way” to solve the roots of the Papua conflict.

The failure of Special Autonomy has driven many parties to think about how to break the political impasse. Hoping to open a process of dialogue, a number of researchers from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences