

Political Reviews

The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 2012

NIC MACLELLAN

Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2012

DAVID CHAPPELL, JON FRAENKEL, SOLOMON KANTHA,
MURIDAN S WIDJOJO

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Wu Bangguo. 2012. Statement by HE Wu Bangguo at the Bilateral Meeting with PM Bainimarama. 24 Sept. Posted on Fiji Government website: http://www.fiji.gov.fj/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6872:statement-by-he-wu-bangguo-at-the-bilateral-meeting-with-pm-bainimarama&catid=50:speeches&Itemid=168 [accessed 25 March 2013]

NEW CALEDONIA

With two years left before a possible referendum on independence, as stipulated in the Noumea Accord of 1998, local leaders struggled to position themselves for an “exit” from that transitional agreement. The provincial elections of 2014 may decide whether a referendum will be held or perhaps another accord will be negotiated. Fluctuations in metropolitan politics have had a significant impact on New Caledonia, notably in 1958 (when nationalist Charles de Gaulle regained power) and 1981 (when Socialist François Mitterrand became president). French presidential elections in May 2012 saw the fall of Gaullist President Nicholas Sarkozy after only one term and the return to power of the Socialists for the first time since 1995, this time under François Hollande. Locally, the year-old alliance between the loyalist Rassemblement-UMP (or RUMP, tied to Sarkozy’s Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) and the pro-sovereignty Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) suffered a setback in the June elections to the French parliament. Former

territorial President Philippe Gomès’s loyalist Calédonie Ensemble (CE, Caledonia Together) won both New Caledonian deputy seats in Paris. In regional relations, the CE objected to a visit to New Caledonia by Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama of Fiji, the head of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, arguing that he has been a military dictator since his 2006 coup. Labor unions remained active, as the cost of living remained high while world nickel prices plummeted due to a slowdown in middle-class Asian demand for stainless steel. But French development aid continued to flow amid local concerns over lingering social and ethnic inequalities.

Sarkozy had proclaimed to French voters that he would strongly defend the “eternal France” of Molière, Napoleon, and Charles de Gaulle, but Hollande reminded listeners that Louis XVI lost his head to the guillotine during the French Revolution and it was the left’s turn to govern the country. Hollande opposed austerity budget cuts during the European Union’s financial crisis and instead wanted to raise taxes on the rich (BBC, 20 April, 28 Sept 2012). Sarkozy had inherited the commitment of his predecessor, Jacques Chirac, to the Noumea Accord, so transfers of self-governing powers to New Caledonia continued, most recently in civil and commercial law and civil security. But Sarkozy had also voiced his personal preference that the country should remain in the French republic, whereas Hollande remained neutral and supported an open public debate among all New Caledonians to decide their future status. Hollande and Sarkozy both wanted to promote more competition

among importers who kept the cost of living so high in New Caledonia, but neither wanted to end the “indexation” that paid French civil servants and retirees almost twice what they would earn in France (NC, 21 April 2012). In the second-round runoff, Sarkozy won 63 percent of the ballots in New Caledonia and 53 percent in French Polynesia, but Hollande won the French presidency; he also won clear majorities in the two Kanak-ruled provinces of New Caledonia and in Wallis and Futuna (PIR, 7 May 2012; NC, 23 April 2012). Hollande appointed Victorin Lurel of Guadeloupe as overseas minister, replacing a Gaullist predecessor, also from Guadeloupe. The FLNKS praised Lurel as a fellow “islander,” while loyalists said he knew nothing about the Pacific (NC, 18 May 2012).

In the June elections, the RUMP lost its long monopoly over local representation in Paris when Gomès and Sonia Lagarde of the CE won in the second-round runoff. At first, it had looked as if the FLNKS might win the deputy seat for the interior of the main island, Grande Terre, because its two main parties, the Union Calédonienne (UC) and Palika (Parti de Libération Kanak), ran on the same list for once. After receiving a plurality in the first round of voting, Jean-Pierre Djaiwé of Palika was interviewed by the local newspaper before the second round, as was Gomès, who came in second in the interior in the first round, having been mayor of La Foa for twenty years. Djaiwé was pleased that the reunited FLNKS had clearly beaten the Rassemblement in his district, but he said that his list had to mobilize Kanak voters in order to overcome

a habitually high abstention rate in French legislative elections. Gomès attributed his success to his commitment to a consensual solution to the Noumea Accord process and to his opposition to Frogier’s change of position in 2011 from regarding the Kanaky flag as a terrorist symbol to having it raised alongside the French tricolor. Gomès hoped to build “a little nation within the big one [France]” by bringing together all Caledonians for a common destiny with a common flag, not two that were once opposed. He referred to South Africa, which had combined its rival flags under Nelson Mandela’s post-apartheid regime (NC, 14 June 2012).

The CE, although loyalist, had often pursued centrist, social democratic policies, sometimes in ad hoc concert with pro-independence parties. But the surprise 2011 alliance between the Rassemblement-UMP and the UC-FLNKS had displaced the CE from the territorial presidency and from key leadership posts in the Congress. The CE had then waged a heated protest campaign against the two flags policy, and even many Rassemblement supporters finally helped to elect Gomès deputy against Djaiwé. Gomès’s second-round victory in the interior district revealed that loyalists, including members of the right-wing National Front, could unite against having a pro-independence deputy in Paris (the late Rock Pidjot of the UC had last filled that role from 1964 to 1986). Many residents were left with a feeling of repolarization in the country’s politics, just when consensual negotiations were needed to complete the Noumea Accord process. Yet the CE’s dramatic comeback also showed

that no one should be marginalized in the current discussions about future status, including Palika, a pro-independence party that the UC and the union-affiliated Labor Party had partly displaced by allying with the Rassemblement last year.

How would these May-June election results affect New Caledonia? The country is already “autonomous” from Paris, and each of its three provinces have significant self-governing powers, leading some legal scholars to call it a *sui generis* entity (ie, no term adequately describes its place in the overseas French political system), which in effect has a “federal” relationship with France. The Noumea Accord specifies that certain administrative responsibilities should be delegated to the country before a possible referendum on whether the so-called reserve powers still held by France (such as defense and public security) should also come under local control. Hollande, like Sarkozy before him, has promised that France will accompany New Caledonia in its process of emancipation as far as local citizens desire. But loyalist concerns over juvenile delinquency among urban Kanak (who often live in squatter camps) and purported foreign threats (eg, from China or “Anglo-Saxon” neighbors or terrorists) make independence unappealing to them. The demography of New Caledonia was radically altered by French-orchestrated immigration during a nickel mining boom in the 1960s and 1970s that ensured a settler majority, and new migrants continue to arrive, though laws that restrict voting and most job hiring to long-term residents are now in place, thereby creating a

form of local citizenship. Given the demographic near parity between an indigenous Kanak minority (45 percent) and migrants, negotiating the exact legal boundary between enlarged autonomy (or association?) and full sovereignty is a challenging and rather technical task. Other key issues include continuing economic development aid and educational training financed by France and by nickel exports and reducing the cost of living and the large income gap between settler-dominated Noumea and the mostly Kanak rural interior and islands (NC, 9 May 2012). The South Province has the largest and most multiethnic population, as well as most of the jobs and squatter camps, so it wants to revise the system of dividing up territorial revenues, of which it produces 75 percent but receives back only half. But the FLNKS has argued that the North and Islands provinces need half for economic “rebalancing,” including the opening of a new nickel mining and processing plant at Koniambo, while the South already has such a plant at Doniambo and another almost completed at Goro.

Kanak independence supporters at first took heart from the reshuffling of metropolitan political cards because the French Socialists, their longtime allies, also took command of the National Assembly in the legislative elections. After Hollande won the presidency, Gerard Regnier of the UC said that the Socialist’s “vision of the emancipation of New Caledonia” would “reassure the Caledonians . . . to find the necessary consensus for the just application of the Noumea Accord.” Michel Jorda of the local Socialist Party said that Sarkozy’s

defeat after only one term of office resulted from his divisive leadership, whereas Hollande's determination to "respect the choice of Caledonians" could help to overcome "this atmosphere of fear that certain people propagate." Gomès, however, said that the economic distress in Europe had pushed one-third of French metropolitan voters to cast their ballots "against the system." That verdict was a nod to the National Front in France, who are also Gomès's new allies locally and complicate his former centrism. Bianca Henin of the local National Front called the doubling of votes cast for her party since 2009 "a sanction against the manipulations that have happened here with the [two] flags affair" (NC, 24 April 2012). Although Gomès himself had sometimes tried to work with Palika but was pushed aside by the RUMP and UC in 2011, the local newspaper surmised that "the loyalist electorate does not want anyone to discuss with the independence supporters except in a crisis [and] wishes a return to the logic of [opposing] blocs" (NC, 18 June 2012).

In fact, the anti-independence Rassemblement, founded in the 1970s, has declined gradually since its partnership with the FLNKS in the Matignon (1988) and Noumea (1998) accords. Frogier's gesture toward the UC-FLNKS last year of raising two flags was a political gamble reminiscent of his party's alliance with a small group of dissident independence supporters in 1999–2004. The sudden success of the moderate Avenir Ensemble (AE, Future Together) party in 2004 was a major challenge to the Gaullist RUMP, bringing centrist loyalists to power

in Congress and the Southern Province. In 2008, the CE split from the AE (now led by Harold Martin), and in 2011, with RUMP and UC-FLNKS support, Martin replaced Gomès as territorial president. Now Gomès and Lagarde of the CE want a reshuffling of portfolios in the territorial cabinet and other commissions in order to reestablish the voice of the CE with its expanded constituency (NC, 5 Sept 2012). Frogier of the RUMP denounced such "radicalization" of local politics by the CE, which he claimed ran a "violent campaign that has awakened old demons" (PIR, 26 June 2012). His ally, President Martin of the AE-UMP, denounced street protests by the CE against the two flags for stirring up "violence between communities" (NC, 18 July 2012), yet other loyalists criticized the FLNKS for arousing Kanak juvenile delinquency by speaking of independence and supporting two flags. Frogier's RUMP debated how to reaffirm its traditional anti-independence stand after the shaky alliance with the UC-FLNKS and the Labor Party. Could loyalists reunite in a "republican pact," as they had temporarily done after the 2009 provincial elections? The eighteen-month grace period instituted by Paris after several local cabinet collapses in 2011 was scheduled to end in October, possibly allowing now-deputy Gomès to return to power (NC, 18 Aug 2012).

The quest for a new flag and country name that was proposed by the Noumea Accord still sparks emotional divisions of opinion. Overseas Minister Lurel met with Paul Néaoutyine of Palika in Paris and then said simply, "The members of this government are interested in the future of New

Caledonia, of Kanaky.” Gomès and Lagarde of the CE called the use of that last word a “regrettable” slip of the tongue, while ex-deputy Gael Yanno of the RUMP accused Lurel of “taking sides” with a pro-independence “minority” and thus stepping on the “yellow line” beyond which lay intercommunal chaos: “The Socialists, once in power [evoking Mitterrand in 1981–1995], have not waited long to put into practice their electoral slogan ‘change is now.’ The Rassemblement-UMP warns the Socialist government: we will fight any unilateral proposal that goes against keeping New Caledonia in France, which would be contrary to the unalterable hopes of the majority of Caledonians. For the Rassemblement-UMP, it’s no to Kanaky! And it will always be no” (NC, 2 Aug 2012).

Lurel replied the next day that Kanaky was “not a bad word,” since the Noumea Accord defended Kanak identity and proposed open discussions to choose a new country name. Some independence supporters have suggested Kanaky New Caledonia as a country name and some loyalists prefer Caledo-Kanaky. The conciliatory decision to raise both flags in 2011 was made at the annual meeting of the signers of the Noumea Accord, but dissident loyalists accused the RUMP and the Sarkozy regime in Paris of “imposing” it on the country (NC, 3 Aug 2012). President Martin proposed that a referendum be held before 2014 on whether to call the country New Caledonia or New Caledonia Kanaky (NC, 17 Aug 2012). In settler-dominated Bourail, the mayor and city council canceled a festival celebrating a “common destiny” because Kanak

customary leaders proposed raising the Kanaky flag along with the French tricolor for the occasion. Instead, local leaders suggested that Congress make the Kanaky flag the country emblem and New Caledonia the country name. They also urged the two associations of mayors, one loyalist and the other pro-independence, to unite for a common destiny (NC, 20 Sept 2012).

If loyalists suffered divisions amid calls for unity, what about the FLNKS, which grew out of a 1970s independence movement and officially came into being in 1984 under the flag of Kanaky? The UC and Palika have often competed with each other. The former party descends from the multiracial, progressive, autonomist party of the 1950s and 1960s, which dominated local politics until the polarizing 1970s put it mainly under the control of Kanak chiefs and church leaders. The latter party arose during the student protest movement of the late 1960s and 1970s and has a more leftist vision, though since the Noumea Accord it has also been willing to work within the government institutions for progressive change. They also differ in their views of whether to have two flags (UC) or seek a common one (Palika, which had already raised both flags together in the North a generation ago). Smaller parties have come and gone within the FLNKS coalition, but the addition in the 1990s of a pro-independence “Oceanian” party composed of migrants from Wallis and Futuna and the prominent membership of pro-independence Europeans and Asians show that “Kanaky” is not an exclusively ethnic label but rather a would-be national one. In late 2011 the Dynamik Unitaire du Sud

(DUS)—which included Kanak such as former Palika activist Sylvain Pabouty and other progressives in the settler-dominated South Province—claimed a thousand followers who support socioeconomic reforms and self-government. In early 2012, the municipal council of Moindou, which at first had refused to raise both the French and Kanak flags together, voted 8-7 to do so as a gesture of mutual respect (NC, 16 Feb 2012). Many people seek constructive dialogue and working relationships, and membership in the territorial cabinet, Congress, and provincial and municipal governing councils is based on proportional representation.

Gomès has criticized the FLNKS for having fluctuating views about the flag issue and about whether to hold a referendum or a negotiation in 2014, whereas he supports one flag and a consensual outcome (NC, 14 June 2012). In March, the FLNKS congress did not produce a unified policy, though party leaders reiterated their belief that the front had achieved a lot since the 1980s, including negotiating the two peace accords, controlling two out of three provinces, and winning 43 percent of the seats in Congress in 2009, as well as gaining the administrative congressional presidency in 2011 (Rock Wamytan). The UC alliance with the RUMP did harm to FLNKS unity, however, by exacerbating the rivalry between the UC and Palika. Néaoutyine, longtime president of the North Province, said that such divisions indicated “perhaps a crisis at the level of the political leadership [but] I don’t think the FLNKS is in crisis regarding its objectives.” Charles Pidjot of the UC agreed: “The FLNKS

does not belong to a party, it belongs to the Kanak people. The FLNKS has always known ups and downs, but on essentials, we have always found ourselves again, and if we have a national congress, it’s with Palika.” Victor Tutugoro of the small Union Progressiste Mélanésienne (UPM) warned, however, that “to prepare the exit from the Noumea Accord, the pro-independence family must be reunited,” and Wallisian Aloisio Sako of the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RDO) said that the front needed to elect a president (no one has held that position for a decade): “To get past cleavages, we need a chief” (NC, 24 March 2012). The Labor Party and DUS are allies but not FLNKS members, and Nidoish Nais-seline’s Libération Kanak Socialiste (LKS) follows its own high chief, while the local, multiethnic Socialist Party is supportive of self-government but separate.

In May, the FLNKS and affiliated labor unions, the local League of the Rights of Man, the Labor Party, and the DUS had achieved significant unity for the French legislative elections. But when Hollande won the French presidency, loyalist voters rallied behind the CE. Frogier of the RUMP complained, “We have gone twenty-five years backwards,” and Wamytan of the UC and Louis Kotra Uregei of the Labor Party expressed concern that the concessions made by the RUMP might not survive the CE resurgence. But Néaoutyine, while on a trip to South Korea to finalize economic deals to have nickel ore processed there until the Northern Koniambo plant is operational, was not worried about shifts in loyalist (or French) politics. He noted that

the RUMP was in free fall after losing both deputy seats, but for a decade it had stalled in fulfilling the Noumea Accord. Its brief alliance with the UC, he said, had enabled pro-independence politicians to acquire a few symbolic posts in the government (eg, Wamytan as Congress president and some UC cabinet ministries), but its losses in the 2012 elections had simply reminded FLNKS members of their own goals. “We’re used to that,” Néaoutyine said, and Palika would “continue as before,” by negotiating with French parliamentary groups and the regime in Paris to lobby for the fulfillment of the Noumea Accord. Palika had been able to work with the AE/CE, and now the Socialists controlled Paris. The annual accord Signers Committee, now enlarged to include the AE, CE, and Labor Party, would “decide if we stop or not.” Néaoutyine warned “the right wing as well as independentists . . . not to pretend that there will be a radicalization, a return backwards of 25 years. They should not play on fear that we lost something. No, we are here to build. People must distinguish between deceptive rhetoric . . . and real political work” (KOL, 1 July 2012).

In French overseas territories, celebrating the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to French revolutionaries is somewhat ironic, but Charles Pidjot of the UC said that the occasion “symbolizes liberty, it’s the birth of the Rights of Man and the Citizen . . . the end of absolutism [similar to] the Kanak cause that wishes for independence” (Calédosphère, 10 July 2012). A flyer for a pro-independence march on Bastille Day vowed that the Kanaky flag would never come down

again because it is the symbol of a struggle for liberty for which many Kanak died in the 1980s. On 14 July 2012, two rival marches occurred in Noumea. One featured the French military and a mostly loyalist audience, but another that marched in the name of “Kanaky 2014” and the common destiny was led by the leftist, pro-independence Union Syndicaliste des Travailleurs Kanak et Exploités (USTKE), from which the Labor Party arose in 2009. Politicians like Frogier and Gomès (and even Wamytan) joined the French high commissioner in front of the Museum of New Caledonia on Moselle Bay to watch the military parade, but as soon as it ended, the seats were taken down before the USTKE march from Vallée du Tir arrived at the nearby Mwâ Kâ (a totem pole sculpted by Kanak artists to symbolize the nation). From a truck, Nicole Waia of the UC called out on a microphone, “We’re not terrorists, we’re not dangerous, come join our ranks!” A young Kanak with a raised fist told a reporter, “We don’t care about the common destiny, that’s an idea invented by France. We are determined, we will use every means to keep our [Kanaky] flag raised.” Some marchers mocked Gomès for repolarizing relations between communities in his quest for a Caledonian flag, saying that some day they would share a 14 July and 24 September (the latter being the date of French annexation in 1853 and regarded by Kanak as a day of sharing or even of mourning). Wamytan said that he attended the French parade out of respect for the men, not their politics: “Philippe Gomès aroused the fear of independence and thus of Kanak.

This march today lets all those who expressed their voices in the legislative elections to send a clear message.” Gomès called the second march “racist,” but Aloisio Sako of the RDO said, “We must build a country and a community. That’s the purpose of this march” (NC, 16 July 2012). Another speaker urged Kanak to register to vote, especially in the South, before the provincial elections of 2014 and the possible referendum (MNP, 22 July 2012).

Wamytan traveled to Paris to nurture ties with the Socialist president of the National Assembly, Claude Bartolone. He promoted his idea of creating a commission to come up with a common flag, an initiative that he acknowledged was a continuation of the earlier gesture made by Frogier regarding the two flags, but which now shifted in the direction of all those who worked for a common destiny (ie, Gomès). Wamytan also lobbied to terminate the indexation of salaries and pensions of French civil servants in New Caledonia in order to help reduce the cost of living there (neither Sarkozy nor Hollande had supported that idea); to encourage the continued transfer of self-governing responsibilities as prescribed in the Noumea Accord; to improve administrative training for local personnel; and to keep the Pasteur Institute (whose branch in French Polynesia has now left) in Noumea to sustain an adequate level of medical care and training in New Caledonia. When asked whether he was hoping to keep his presidency of Congress, which had to be renewed in late August, Wamytan said that he would like to keep his post but was not clinging to it

because he wanted to restore cooperation and consensual negotiation in the country (NC, 20 July 2012).

Three Kanak ran for election as Congress president in August: Wamytan and two loyalists, Gerard Poadja of the CE and Simon Loueckhote, an ex-RUMP leader. In the third round of voting, Wamytan received 25 votes, including 2 from loyalists, but Loueckhote suddenly supported Poadja, who thus won with 28 votes in yet another loyalist rally against a pro-independence candidate. Poadja promised “change” and “greater efficiency” to fulfill the Noumea Accord, but some pro-independence members complained loudly and walked out. A Kanak from the North (Koné), Poadja and his family have opposed independence since the 1980s (NC, 30 Aug 2012). Independence supporters, who had felt hopeful after gaining the Congress presidency last year due to the earlier UC-RUMP alliance, now felt bitter. The UC talked of a possible resignation from the territorial cabinet, a tactic that the UC (followed by the CE in revenge) had used in 2011, or perhaps a boycott of the annual Signers Committee meeting in late 2012. UC Secretary General Regnier said, “We’re facing a blockage” because the policy of sharing and making concessions seemed over, and leaders were already positioning themselves for the provincial elections of 2014 (NC, 24 Sept 2012). The death of Charles Pidjot of the UC, on a medical visit to Vanuatu, was another blow to Kanak leadership (NC, 12 Sept 2012).

Regionally, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) was formed in the late 1980s, in part to support the Kanak liberation struggle. It has

been monitoring progress under the Noumea Accord, voicing concerns about socioeconomic inequalities and the nominal role the Customary Senate plays in decision making. The FLNKS has been a member since the 1990s, despite the fact that the other members (Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea) are independent countries. France has recently sought to insert the New Caledonian cabinet leadership as a substitute for “Kanaky.” A controversy arose in 2012 when Gomès opposed a visit of the MSG led by Commodore Bainimarama of Fiji, who had come to power in 2006 and still had not held democratic elections. As a former MSG head himself, Wamytan prioritized keeping good relations with neighboring countries and maintaining regional diplomatic pressure to fulfill the Noumea Accord. He said Bainimarama did not have blood on his hands and only wanted to purge his country of corruption. Moreover, he said, France had welcomed its share of dictators in the past, including Muammar Qaddafi of Libya. So Wamytan had visited the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Paris to lobby for granting a visa to Bainimarama, but to no avail (NC, 20 July 2012). Wamytan had signed a separate cooperation agreement between the Congress of New Caledonia and the MSG that would enable more young New Caledonians to serve in the MSG Secretariat (PIR, 29 Feb 2012). But Gomès led criticisms of Wamytan’s attendance at an MSG Foreign Ministers meeting in Fiji as “scandalous,” and as deputy in Paris he lobbied against Bainimarama’s visit to New Caledonia. The MSG visit was postponed, “on advice from the

French embassy in Suva, which says it was never asked to issue the Fiji delegates a visa” (PIR, 11 July 2012; NC, 13 April 2012). The Fiji foreign affairs minister finally led the MSG mission instead of Bainimarama and met with President Martin in Noumea, where they discussed both implementation of the Noumea Accord and progress in Fiji toward holding elections in 2014 (PIR, 17 Aug, 24 Aug 2012). The FLNKS later learned that it would again hold the chairship of the MSG from 2013 to 2015 (NC, 1 Oct 2012).

Resurgent CE leaders, including deputies Gomès and Lagarde, opposed a new tax on goods and services of 6 percent, which Congress had passed as a “country law” (needs approval by Paris). The CE warned that it would cause an “inflationary shock” in local prices and asked whether the new tax would apply to basic foodstuffs and to airfares from the outer islands (NC, 10 Jan 2012). The two deputies also voiced concern about a RUMP proposal to allow yet another casino in New Caledonia, this time to finance a new local television station, because middle-class families might take more risks (NC, 9 July 2012). The CE successfully lobbied the French Council of State to question a RUMP plan to improve infrastructure in the squatter camps around urban areas in the South as a cost-saving policy, rather than to build affordable housing as the previous CE regime had done. The CE also asked the Administrative Tribunal of Noumea to halt such “rehabilitations” and accused the RUMP of promoting “ghettoization” and “racial segregation” (NC, 1 Aug 2012). The tribunal agreed, but the policy is still being debated. The FLNKS agreed with

the RUMP and AE that squatters need water, electricity, sanitation, and transportation now, not later, and some squatter leaders said that they prefer the “Oceanian lifestyle” of having their own gardens and access to the bush (NC, 14 Sept, 28 Sept 2012).

Despite some ethnic repolarization over the independence issue, loyalist unity remains elusive. In October, President Martin spoke to the United Nations about progress under the Noumea Accord. Without naming the CE, he criticized it for opposing the raising of the two flags, a “very symbolic gesture of peace and reconciliation among the communities,” and for “prematurely beginning the election campaign of 2014,” while blocking efforts at “major reforms for social justice and reduced inequalities” (AE, 10 Oct 2012). Gomès responded that attacking a political party at an international forum “disqualified” Martin from continuing as the country’s president and invited another possible mass resignation by the CE that would bring down his cabinet, now that the eighteen-month grace period was ending (NC, 19 Oct 2012). Gomès also accused the Martin-led cabinet of not pursuing reforms such as reducing the cost of living and building affordable housing, while the UC boycotted French-sponsored technical advisory meetings and Palika complained about a lack of collegiality. Gomès introduced a censure motion against the Martin cabinet, but the RUMP and most of the UC voted it down, while Palika and UC dissidents supported the CE on that issue. Gomès later resigned from the cabinet to be replaced by another CE member, but Martin said that he would consider reallocating

portfolios (NC, 22 Dec, 26 Dec 2012). Gomès and Lagarde joined forces in Paris with a new political federation that included dissidents from Sarkozy’s UMP, which was splitting into right-wing and centrist factions (NC, 24 Oct, 10 Dec 2012). The CE unveiled a twelve-point platform that claimed to seek consensus, collegiality, fulfillment of the Noumea Accord, economic planning and development, and social and educational reforms that would unify the country. The AE-RUMP and UC-FLNKS replied that Gomès was a demagogue who sought to regain power by reviving old political divisions (NC, 27 Oct 2012).

In Congress, the RUMP tried to tie passage of a revised tax on goods and services to reforming the unequal distribution of territorial revenues among the three provinces. Pierre Bretegnier of the RUMP, who had earlier proposed annexing Wallis and Futuna (PIR, 9 Jan 2012), spoke for many loyalists when he accused the North of hoarding its revenue share instead of investing it in infrastructure, thereby creating “a war chest” for Néooutyine instead of enabling the North and Islands to retain inhabitants by creating jobs (NC, 11 Aug 2012). Independence supporters worried that the limited electorate on key votes (provincial elections and an independence referendum, in which only long-term residents can participate) will be threatened if the loyalist majority adopts a hard line against Kanaky. Meanwhile, nine traditional Kanak huts that were erected near the Mwâ Kâ for the 24 September festival of shared citizenship (instead of French annexation) had to be relocated next to the Maritime Museum after contro-

versy and negotiation; some huts were simply demolished after the festival to free up parking spaces (*NC*, 11 Oct 2012). Déwé Gorodé of Palika, vice president of the cabinet until 2011, said of that attempted “tribe in the city” project, “We already have a common past, we are in a common present and obviously, of course, we’re headed toward a common destiny” (*KOL*, 1 Nov 2012).

In November, Overseas Minister Lurel visited the country and made the rounds to familiarize himself with places and people. He promised full application of the Noumea Accord, hinting at pushing for some of the additional transfers of control it suggested, but he said that Paris would remain neutral and “equidistant” from local political rivals over controversial identity symbols and the possibility of independence. He reminded people that 2014, when a possible referendum on independence could take place, was not an end but rather a beginning: “You will have to build a more egalitarian, cohesive society” that educates young people better, especially Kanak (*NC*, 24 Nov 2012). Daniel Goa replaced the late Charles Pidjot as UC leader and suggested putting identity issues on hold in order to “build a country”; otherwise, he said, “we won’t get far” (*NC*, 29 Nov 2012). Despite recent electoral defeats and consequent UMP scission in both France and New Caledonia, Frogier still opposed repolarization, arguing that his leadership role required having a vision for the country and hence a willingness to dialogue with pro-independence parties (*NC*, 23 Nov 2012). At the meeting in Paris of the now-enlarged Signers Committee of

the Noumea Accord, each party voiced its positions. Gomès accused the RUMP and UC of cooperation on creating a local citizenship and on revising the distribution of tax revenues among the provinces, but broader efforts at consensus emerged on transfers of governing powers and the training of personnel, combating the high cost of living, and French aid in socio-economic and educational reforms. As the local newspaper observed, “It was above all about pursuing or beginning discussions” (*NC*, 8 Dec 2012). The Labor Party pushed for a referendum on independence in 2014, but Palika and the UC seemed more flexible and desirous of advance preparations, while Frogier and Wamytan spoke of maintaining the historical role of the RUMP and UC (*NC*, 14 Dec, 17 Dec 2012). Frogier criticized “Maximum Leader” Gomès, the Labor Party, and dissidents within his own party for reviving tensions when it was negotiation that was needed, but he also called the RUMP the party that “had taken up arms when it had to, to stay on this French land” (*NC*, 21 Dec 2012).

Most workers, whether in the public or private sectors, belong to labor unions in New Caledonia. The Union Syndicaliste des Ouvriers et Employés de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (USOENC) remains the largest federation (22 percent), with USTKE second (15 percent), and the Federation of Civil Servants third (13 percent). USOENC has waged a long campaign against the high cost of living, while USTKE remains committed to Kanak independence and pollution controls. USTKE organized a May Day parade and expressed concern about the

unemployment rate among young people, especially Kanak (NC, 2 May 2012). The inflated real estate market in Noumea has been declining as investors complain of “government instability” at the approach of 2014, rising taxes, and reduced French aid subsidies (NC, 20 Feb 2012). More apartment buildings in Noumea are depending on rents from large, non-European families. Arrested juvenile delinquents are given seminars in good citizenship, but sales of firearms have tripled in a year (NC, 3 Aug 2012). After a lawsuit filed by human-rights lawyers, France agreed to upgrade the local prison facility (PIR, 2 Aug 2012, 17 Aug 2012).

This year, a country law took effect that restricted hiring to local citizens of long residence, with ranked exemptions made for difficult-to-fill specializations, but more vocational training for local citizens is needed (NC, 23 Feb 2012). Meanwhile, 6,000 Asian migrant workers are helping to build new nickel-processing plants at Goro in the South and Koniambo in the North, to supplement the Société le Nickel’s Doniambo plant near Noumea. They are paid the local minimum wage but have their meals, lodging, and other benefits deducted from that, making them cheaper to hire than locals (NC, 2 Feb 2012). Nickel prices fell to their lowest since 2010, and the Goro project has been nagged by various construction and pollution issues, so its parent company may sell it (NC, 2 Nov 2012). The Koniambo project is envisioned as an employment magnet for young Kanak, but one challenge is making arrangements with local workers and villages to include their participation

and respect their environmental concerns.

The North Province owns 51 percent of the South Pacific Mining Company (Société Minière du Sud Pacifique, or SMSP), which has also negotiated nickel-processing and trade deals with firms in South Korea and China (NC, 28 Feb, 29 Aug 2012). Néaoutyine and André Dang of the SMSP negotiated an unprecedented partnership with Jinchuan of China that gives the North Province 51 percent ownership in a processing plant in that country, the same kind of arrangement that the North has with Posco in South Korea. China had to make an exception in its own laws to allow such majority foreign ownership (NC, 11 Sept 2012). The North has also purchased prefabricated structures from China for its Koniambo plant. Western powers have sometimes expressed concerns about increasing intrusions into their own strategic “lake” by Chinese diplomacy and economic aid or trade (Wesley-Smith 2007; Lanteigne 2012). But indigenuous leaders seek to broaden their postcolonial options. Making one’s own choices of international partners is what the late Jean-Marie Tjibaou called sovereignty.

DAVID CHAPPELL

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PAPUA

In 2012 the Government of Indonesia failed in dealing with the sporadic attacks by the armed resistance groups called the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka [OPM])–National Liberation Army (Tentara Pembebasan Nasional [TPN]) and other “unknown persons.” As far as their responsibility for this failure is concerned, the Indonesian government sometimes showed its frustration by blaming difficult geographical conditions, limited numbers of personnel, and lack of equipment. Even though the challenges were greater this year, the security policy of the government was similar to that of 2011 and did not succeed in coping with the complex reality. In general, it did not demonstrate to the public that the state was present and that laws were being enforced justly. Compared to 2011 (38 attacks resulting in 52 deaths and 573

injured), 2012 saw a higher number of violent cases (67 instances resulting in 45 deaths and 120 injured). The number of casualties during 2012 was lower than in the previous year only because 2011 saw three communal clashes during the local election in Puncak in which casualties were high (35 dead and about 500 injured).

In line with the government’s security policy, the political policy during 2012 looked stagnant on the surface. The government tried to maintain an image that Papua was under control. Disturbances were framed as minor and insignificant. The real policy, hidden from the public and civil society, was implemented behind the scenes. Intelligence units associated with the military/police/civil government bodies as well as formal intelligence bodies such as Badan Intelijen Negara (BIN, the State Intelligence Agency) and Badan Intelijen Strategis (BAIS, the Armed Forces Strategic Intelligence Agency) played a dominant role. But among these intelligence units there is a lack of coordination, and rivalries are rampant. The overarching goal of “defending the sovereignty of Indonesia” is not formulated in a clear policy but rather emerges in reactionary and ad hoc ways.

This closed political policy reflects the dominance of old political players within the central government bureaucracy, who were mostly high officers recruited from the army. These officials tend to look down on Papuans. The situation is worsened by a deep mutual distrust between the government and the people of Papua. The resulting policy has constructed a political configuration overwhelmed by intrigue, rumor, suspicion, and