

detailed study (hopefully, much of it by Solomon Islanders) and, inevitably, a challenge to counterinterpretation.

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*The Politics of Electoral Duality: Experience and Elections in New Caledonia*, by Alan Clark. Occasional Paper no. 2. Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, January 1987. 58 pp, map, notes, tables, bibliography. NZ\$8.80.

*New Caledonia: Essays in Nationalism and Dependency*, edited by Michael Spencer, Alan Ward, and John Connell. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988. xiv + 253 pp, maps, notes, chronology. A\$19.95 paperback.

Unlike most Pacific Island countries, whose demographic majorities are clearly either indigenous or immigrant, New Caledonia is a bipolar society. Its mainly rural native peoples and mainly urban colonists—Jean Guiart likens Noumea to an ancient Greek city-state, others call it a French fortress—face a political conundrum that meddling by Paris only worsens.

Alan Clark, a French language and history scholar from New Zealand and longtime visitor to New Caledonia, rejects the usual “binary” view of the crisis as a struggle between French

colonialism and Kanak nationalism. He argues that the real conflict is among three to four groups—indigenous Melanesians (43%), immigrant Europeans (37%) and non-Europeans (20%), and metropolitan French officials—each of which is divided and at least partly responsible for the problem. He focuses on historical experience and constitutional evolution, insisting that the future of New Caledonia lies in “the permanent character and—short of protracted civil conflict—the stark unavoidability of the electoral dimension” (29). His explication of the debate over who should be allowed to vote in territorial elections reveals a gray area that both Kanaks and French seek to define to their own advantage. Ultimately, he foresees neither the maintenance of the tense status quo nor independence for the outnumbered Kanaks as practicable, but rather a “neo-Caledonia” that treats all ethnic groups fairly and still preserves French metropolitan interests in the South Pacific.

Clark obviously wants Western-style democracy for a country whose indigenous people accuse France of using that principle as a weapon to keep them from gaining their freedom. Indigenous Fijian leaders, in a similar bipolar situation, rejected democracy when the 1987 election threatened their power, but in New Caledonia France holds the military card, as its May 1988 massacre of nineteen Kanak kidnappers demonstrated. Clark himself admits that the pattern in New Caledonia has been one of repeated metropolitan intervention in local political processes and frequent revision (from Paris) of territorial statutes, often in response to “extralegal”

actions by militant minorities. His rather pious declaration that France "is a nation-state wedded to a written constitution" (30) is ironic, given that in the past two centuries France has had five republics, two Napoleonic empires, and two monarchies because of revolutionary upheaval. In 1958, the same year that a settler quasi-coup in Noumea halted progress toward autonomy, rebellious paratroopers threatened Paris and brought Charles de Gaulle to power.

Moreover, Clark's attempt to avoid being "arrogant" (partisan) produces a few odd arguments: although the Melanesian population declined from the 1880s to the 1920s, so did the French (from emigration, however, not death), and if Melanesians could not vote before 1945, neither could French women (their husbands, at least, were not disenfranchised because of their race). He cites instances of violence by Kanak radicals but glosses over that by white settlers (*Caldoches*) and their Asian or Polynesian allies: "the non-indigenous majority in New Caledonia has exercised its independence in preferring to remain French" (24). His theme of electoral duality, which he never fully defines, seems to apply mainly to French metropolitan manipulations—whether Gaullist or Socialist—and to Kanak flip-flopping on electoral participation. He asks, for example, why the Kanaks gave up their share of power in the 1982 government, but ignores the fact that *Caldoche* extremists invaded the meeting hall, drove out the delegates, and smashed the windows.

The essays compiled by Michael Spencer, Alan Ward, and John Connell

examine more than elections. Indeed, the editors assert in their introduction that the 1987 referendum on independence in New Caledonia was as "crude" a method for establishing community as the Fiji coups. The editors agree with Clark that the demography of New Caledonia is complex and that it suffers from the "double legitimacy" of the two major ethnic rival groups, but contend that the situation is nevertheless colonial—sustained by force—and that the ideology of multiracialism has at times been bolstered by deliberate French and Polynesian immigration to produce a pro-Parisian majority. Ties of economic dependence—half the territorial budget, nickel industry subsidies, and a bureaucracy that employs a quarter of the population—also buy votes for Paris in a "consumer colony" reminiscent of American Micronesia. French strategic interests may prevent independence indefinitely, the editors argue, but true democracy should respect the rights of minorities as well as the will of the majority. They envision an arrangement similar to that between the Cook Islands and New Zealand, if France forces dialogue "by instituting a steady and progressive devolution of responsibility" (18).

The strength of this volume is the diversity of its contributors: five Anglophones, four French, and three Kanaks. Most agree with Clark that France has projected its domestic politics into its New Caledonian policies. Spencer, a French language specialist, proves that press coverage by *Le Figaro* and its affiliated newspapers has been either superficial or biased, while Robert Aldrich finds the same fault with French historiography. Jean-

Marie Kohler and Michael Ovington show that church ambivalence toward decolonization and the heavy-handedness of metropolitan reformers have both contributed to polarization in the territory. Alan Ward, a respected scholar of southwest Pacific land problems, scolds Kanaks for "false assertions that they ceased to be the majority only in the 1970s" and harks back to the 1950s, when metropolitan leftists encouraged French emigration to New Caledonia—despite the objections of *Caldoches* who resented competition from more *Métros*—to keep Asians or Anglo-Saxons from taking over. Patrick Pillon's analysis of rural development schemes concludes that New Caledonia is caught in a historical limbo because its lack of good land and distributable resources failed to produce a clear hegemony for colonists, as in Australia or New Zealand. Indeed, Alain Saussol, perhaps the foremost authority on land issues in New Caledonia, argues that the colonial order was "gently running down" when the Melanesian population began its demographic comeback.

The issue of nationalism in the territory invites some disagreement among the contributors. Jean Chesneaux, recognized for his studies of peasant rebellion in China and Vietnam and author of a recent book of reflections called *Transpacifiques*, describes Kanak political culture as a blend of traditional and modern components but also calls the privileged enclave of *Métros* and *Caldoches* very *un-French*—part of that artificially subsidized overseas fantasy he terms *franconésie*. Like Chesneaux, Saussol is condescending toward the *Caldoche* gentry. He

attributes the Kanak cultural revival as much to intensifying "silent competition" over land between natives and immigrants as to wartime American influence (material and egalitarian) or postwar Melanesian citizenship. John Connell, who has recently authored a comprehensive political history of New Caledonia, claims in his concluding comparative essay on Melanesian nationalism that the vision of an independent "Kanak" is evolving in an "artificial context." The lingering colonial legacy of discrimination and martyrdom makes Kanak neotraditional syncretism a more militant form of nationalism than that found in neighboring Melanesian countries. Moreover, Kanak community schools and cooperatives are, as he quotes Amílcar Cabral, "proof not only of identity but also of dignity" (246).

The interviews with Marie-Adèle Néchéro-Jorédié and Adrien Hnangan and the poem by Déwé Gorodey indicate that Kanak activists believe they can create "interdependence" among their people in order to achieve independence from France: "*we must rediscover ourselves, in our environment, in our language, with our life*" (205). Even if the no longer French *Caldoches*, with the help of metropolitan armed forces and Polynesian and Asian voters, do maintain some sort of supremacy—just as South Africans and Israelis continue to suppress their domestic ethnic rivals—neo-Kanak is likely to grow stronger in the neo-Caledonian arena.

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