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DISCUSSION PAPER

"THE BET ON INTELLIGENCE": POLITICS IN NEW CALEDONIA, 1988-2002

Discussion
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In the eyes of regional and international authorities, the situation in New Caledonia today has changed markedly since the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation re-registered New Caledonia on its list of "non autonomous territories" in 1986. In the 1980s, the negative image that France acquired as a result of nuclear testing and the Greenpeace affair meant that calls for independence by New Caledonian freedom fighters were received sympathetically by neighbouring states. Although New Caledonia has been a French possession since 1853, it is situated in an English-speaking zone where many neighbouring states have attained independence (Fiji in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975, the Solomon Islands in 1978, Vanuatu in 1980). New Caledonia thus appeared to be in an anomalous situation despite the number of associated states or territories elsewhere in the Pacific (American Micronesia, American Samoa, Easter Island, Niue and Tokelau, and the other French Overseas Territories).

Since 1986 there have been a number of changes: nuclear testing in French Polynesia has ceased; Australian foreign policy has changed; French diplomacy in Fiji and Vanuatu has become more dynamic; internal crises have arisen in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon

Islands, and Fiji; in contrast, the political situation in New Caledonia has been generally positive. On 13 July 1995, the Committee on Decolonisation announced that it was pleased "with the extent of the constructive measures that the French authorities are taking in New Caledonia ... in order to create a favourable environment for a peaceful progression towards self-determination". Yet, while diplomatic pressure undoubtedly partly explains France's policy, New Caledonia's insularity limits its influence and the regional stakes are not such that regional players can impose paradoxical behaviour on the French state.

The purpose of this paper is not to examine New Caledonian society or identity or the history of the (political) "events" of 1984-1989 but to contribute to an understanding of the current political situation in an archipelago which is no longer an Overseas Territory and yet not an independent state either. I question whether the three partners to the Matignon and Noumea Accords have been able to capitalise on the "bet on intelligence" - the reasoned cohabitation which they imposed upon themselves in 1988. After examining the implementation of the Matignon and Noumea Accords, I broach the subject of recent political developments in New Caledonia.

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THE PERIOD OF THE MATIGNON ACCORDS, 1988-1998¹

"A bet on intelligence"

In 1988 New Caledonia's main pro- and anti-independence parties, the FLNKS (Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste) and the RPCR (Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République), decided to halt the spiral of destruction and deaths which had brought New Caledonia close to civil war in the previous four years and to institute a search for a consensual solution with the French state. The aims of the Matignon Accords were, therefore, to restore peace; to establish new institutions; to allow self-government at a regional level; and to allow dialogue between the French government, which at that time favoured a fast accession to independence, and the local political majority which favoured maintaining New Caledonia within the French Republic. The framework agreement signed by the French state, the RPCR, and the FLNKS on 26 June 1988 provided that the state, represented by its High Commissioner, would directly govern the Territory for one year before setting up a new statute to institute provincial self-government. It also provided that a referendum on self-determination would be held in 1998. Some Kanak initially rejected the agreement and the famous handshake between FLNKS leader, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, and RPCR leader, Jacques Lafleur, as they considered, like Léopold Jorédié, that "the slave [had] agreed to shake his Master's hand in order to heal the breach with the French".²

The second phase of negotiations ended on 20 August 1988 when representatives of the two parties signed the Oudinot Accord, the short-term objective of which was to reorganise New Caledonian politics and, in the long-term, restore economic, social, and cultural balance within the Territory. The French Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, described the Accords as "a bet on intelligence" – a gamble on the ability of New Caledonians and their leaders to come to an intelligent understanding on New Caledonia's future.

Restoring the balance

The concept of restoring the balance, which was central to political debates over the next ten years, was based on the identification of an imbalance between Kanak communities, concentrated in the North and Loyalty Islands Provinces, and non-Kanak

communities, concentrated in Noumea and the South Province. The Accords thus proposed an uneven distribution of state funding and revenue from indirect taxation in favour of the economically less developed regions. The FLNKS considered that this redress for colonization was necessary and the RPCR considered that a better division of wealth would reduce political divisions.

The resulting statute, known as the Rocard statute, was ratified by a national referendum of all French voters on 6 November 1988. Officially, the referendum was chosen in order to give legitimacy to the process set up under the Accords. Unofficially, it allowed the electorate for the 1998 referendum to be restricted to the "populations concerned by the Territory's future" (that is, Kanak and descendants of transported convicts, colonists, and other immigrants). The Rocard statute also contained an amnesty for infringements "of a political, economic and social nature".³ Had these articles been part of an ordinary parliamentary bill, they could have been censured by the Constitutional Council. Political parties in metropolitan France, apart from the National Front, were mainly in favour of endorsing the Accords. However, in New Caledonia, Lafleur and Tjibaou had to work to convince their electorates. Paradoxically, this was more difficult for the pro-independence leader, the big winner from the negotiations, because of the federal structure of the FLNKS and the Melanesian preference for consensus politics. There was a high rate of abstention from the referendum and although the proposition was approved by an overall majority of 80%, only 57% of voters in New Caledonia were in favour. A breakdown of the vote by region showed that supporters of the RPCR had mainly voted against the proposal. In the South, 60% of voters opposed the Accords, though they did not call into question the legitimacy of Lafleur, the pyramidal structure of the RPCR, or Lafleur's grass roots commitment to gradually alleviating concerns.

The Rocard statute came into effect on 12 July 1989. It provided for a new federal type organization of New Caledonia into three provinces: the North, South, and Islands Provinces. Rocard subsequently indicated that it was "a federative system although I did not use this word in the statute so as not to risk a useless symbolic conflict".⁴ In fact, the statute was inspired by the concept of internal autonomy which was applied at provincial, rather than territorial, level. In addition, for reasons of "societal peace", the Rocard statute

recognized the particular status of Melanesians through the creation of a Customary Advisory Council and the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture (ADCK). The French government also undertook to finance the ADCK's flagship institution, the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

The process of restoring a balance in favour of the Melanesian population was based on development contracts between the state and provinces, the "400 executives plan" which aimed to train New Caledonians (primarily of Melanesian origin) over 10 years, and the transfer of the Agency for Rural Development and Land Improvement (ADRAF) from territorial to state control. Between 1989 and 1995, ADRAF distributed 82,000 ha, which meant a 36% increase in Melanesian land holdings. This impressive system in favour of economic and social rebalancing related primarily to the public sector: private companies did come to work in the North and Islands Provinces but most are based in the South Province and Noumea because of the absence of other significant urban centres. Political aggressiveness, therefore, was not enough to make significant regional disparities disappear.

These disparities remain significant, even in 2002. Thus, out of 210,000 inhabitants, 135,000 reside in the South Province and only 23,000 in the Loyalty Islands. The population of the Islands and North Provinces is overwhelmingly Kanak (97% and 80%) whereas 75% of the population in the South Province is non-Kanak. In parallel, 88% of paid workers reside in the South and only 2% in the Islands Province. Lastly, if Noumea has 80,000 inhabitants, the three nearby dormitory municipalities of Mont Dore, Dumbéa, and Païta have 20,000, 14,000, and 8,000 respectively, whereas the three main "bush" municipalities of Bourail, Poindimié, and Houaïlou have only about 4,500 inhabitants. In addition to these disparities, there are other obstacles to economic development: outside Noumea, the population density is low, relatively few Kanak are integrated in the market economy, New Caledonia's isolation limits the expansion of secondary industries, and major financial transfers from the state have established an artificial economy. Notwithstanding these difficulties, New Caledonians in general took advantage of the ten years of the Matignon Accords to improve a damaged economy and to learn to communicate with each other again.

During this decade, New Caledonia only experienced two major problems: the narrowness

of the labour market and the development of "squatter" settlements in Noumea.⁵ As the North and Islands Provinces were unable to generate sufficient employment, many families had had to take refuge in the South during the "events" and many young Oceanians were drawn to an urban way of life. The real estate market of "Greater Noumea", which is highly priced and not easily expanded, has had difficulty absorbing this influx. The result has been the creation of "spontaneous" dwellings on Noumea's many empty plots. One cannot, however, compare these "squats" with the shantytowns of developing countries for several reasons: they are almost the same as traditional Oceanian dwellings; their "owners" generally have incomes which are higher than the guaranteed minimum wage; and the municipality of Noumea has finally agreed to supply many with water and electricity.

From an economic point of view, the OECD ranks New Caledonia as the 24th richest country in the world thanks to the direct and indirect financial transfers made by France and to nickel ore deposits (500 billion dollars of reserves). For the last century, the mining and metallurgy sector (90% of exports) has been the principal private provider of employment even though improved productivity has reduced labour requirements. The exploitation of natural resources has regressed in labour intensive sectors (coffee, copra) and progressed in fields requiring capital and know-how such as aquaculture and deer breeding. Noumea's tertiary sector is equivalent to that of an agglomeration of 200,000 inhabitants because of the financial flows generated by a large civil service (10,000 civil servants, that is, 5% of the total population) and by wage indexing of the public sector (1.73 for greater Noumea and 1.94 for the remainder of the archipelago).

From a political point of view, the Matignon decade was a period of construction during which elected officials invested much of their energy in regional economic advancement and the setting up of the provincial governments. After the signing of the Accords, Jean-Marie Tjibaou declared: "I know that in 1998 I will not have the majority; my only chance is to convince you to agree to independence with us". The process of rebalancing continued despite Tjibaou's violent death on 4 May 1989 at the hands of a former pastor and FLNKS territorial advisor for whom the Matignon Accords were a betrayal of the Kanak activists killed in confrontation with the French state in 1988. Lafleur kept his promise to Tjibaou by selling

his shares in the South Pacific Mining Company (SMSP) to the North Province. The capital necessary for the transaction was provided by the state as part of its commitment to rebalancing.

Circumventing polarisation?

Notwithstanding the energies invested in economic projects, the 1998 referendum foreshadowed by the Matignon Accords meant that the independence issue was never far from the top of the political agenda. Attempts to circumvent the polarisation that such a poll was likely to create eventually led to the 1998 Noumea Accord. At an RPCR convention in April 1991, Lafleur launched the idea of a "consensual solution" in order to avoid a referendum which would inevitably be won by the partisans of the French Republic but which would probably have provoked another cycle of violence. The Union Calédonienne (UC), the largest party within the FLNKS, took up a similar idea at the time of its Païta congress in 1993 by favouring "negotiated independence". However, as the idea first had to be accepted by both political leaders and militants, negotiation on this issue really only began in 1995. The RPCR then published a "scheme for the emancipation and broad decentralisation of New Caledonia" intended as a basis for talks. The UC's 1996 congress developed an "Outline for the Institutional Future of the Territory" and the state was asked to make a "strong gesture" to settle "the colonial dispute" and favourably consider the concept of "an associated state".⁶ Lafleur responded with the principle of "emancipation in the Republic", an attempt to reconcile the idea of New Caledonian self-responsibility with ongoing membership of the French Republic.

These negotiations were soon hindered by the issue of access to mining resources which the FLNKS saw as crucial to the process of rebalancing and as a "prerequisite" to political talks. In 1998 this stumbling block was removed when the French State-owned company, Eramet, agreed to exchange nickel reserves at Koniambo for reserves at Poum owned by the SMSP (controlled by the mainly pro-independence North Province). The acquisition of Koniambo has given the SMSP sufficient reserves to implement a major mining project with the Canadian mining company, Falconbridge. Certain analysts considered that if land claims had been at the heart of political debates during the 1980s, then mining claims were on the way to becoming the focal point for future political debates.

SETTLING THE "COLONIAL DISPUTE": THE NOUMEA ACCORD, 1998

Gradual devolution of powers

The eventual outcome of ongoing talks between the FLNKS, the RPCR, and the French state was the Noumea Accord, concluded on 21 April 1998.⁸ The new Accord has instituted a fifteen to twenty year period of progressive and irreversible institutional development. This includes the gradual devolution of non-sovereign state powers to a New Caledonian Congress which is authorised to enact "country laws" having the force of "national" laws if voted by 3/4 of the elected officials. The three provinces keep the powers acquired in 1988 but the executive offices of government have passed from the High-Commissioner to a collegial government elected by the members of the Congress to which it is accountable. When the new Overseas Country (rather than Overseas Territory) came into being on 1 January 2000, it took over control of immigration, communications, training, natural resources, and foreign trade. The state has undertaken "to contribute to the funding of the transferred powers" (with adjustments for inflation). The precise timetable for subsequent transfers is only vaguely expressed in terms of the second and third terms of the Congress (elected at five year intervals). The country will share certain powers (such as international and regional relations) with France but by 2019 France will retain only its "reserved" or sovereign powers.

Referendum provisions

The Noumea Accord circumvented the 1998 referendum on self-determination planned under the Matignon Accords by providing for a referendum on the devolution of the "reserved" powers to be held during the fourth term of the Congress in 2019 (or as early as 2014 if one third of the elected officials so choose). The referendum will determine if New Caledonians wish to reach "a complete emancipation" (that is, political independence), maintain the status quo, or negotiate a new statute with France. In no circumstances will France be able to renege on the statute which New Caledonia has acquired by the time of the poll. For this referendum, the proponents of independence have obtained the establishment of a restricted electorate. Only New Caledonian citizens who arrived before 1998, or who come of age after

1998, or who, in 2014, will have resided there for more than twenty years will be entitled to take part in the referendum.⁹

Recognising Kanak identity

Another important feature of the Noumea Accord is the place it accords to Kanak identity at the symbolic centre of the New Caledonian political system. As early as the round-table discussions held at Nainvilles-les-Roches in 1983, the French State had recognised that the foremost demand of Melanesians is the recognition of their cultural identity and their status as the first occupants of New Caledonia. When the Noumea Accord was being prepared, freedom fighters required that the state make a strong and impartial statement recognising the good and "the bad" of the colonial period. This statement, in the form of the preamble to the Noumea Accord, was accepted by all the political parties for, if it acknowledged that "colonisation had a long-lasting traumatic effect on the original people" and recognised that "colonisation harmed the dignity of the Kanak people and deprived them of their identity", it also paid homage to the communities which took part in the construction of New Caledonia: "Men and women came in great numbers in the 19th and 20th centuries, convinced they were bringing progress, buoyed by their religious faith, against their will or looking for a second chance in New Caledonia". It is hoped that this dual acknowledgement, invoking the existence of two legitimacies and aimed at forging a "common destiny", will cement a lasting reconciliation between the communities living in New Caledonia.

In concrete terms, this recognition has involved the creation of a Customary Senate composed of representatives of the eight linguistic areas (28 vernacular languages). This senate must be consulted on all decisions relating to the Kanak identity. There are also plans to take better account of Kanak identity through the regulation of "the Special Civil Law Status" which is now referred to as "Customary Status", the protection of sacred and historical sites, and the teaching of Kanak languages. A New Caledonian citizenship has been instituted making possible positive discrimination in favour of people who have been settled in New Caledonia for at least ten years.

Legally, such a statute might appear "monstrous" to certain lawyers. Pierre Frogier, deputy leader of the RPCR and mayor of Noumea, answered this criticism during a conference on shared sovereignty in December

1999: "We did not build a statute, we built a society project around which each party could come together. We tried to lay out a path and open prospects which make it possible for various communities to continue their effort of mutual and peaceful recognition. And we arrived at a solution of broad emancipation".

Implementation of the Accord

The first stage in the implementation of the Noumea Accord involved altering the French constitution. On 6 July 1998, the French National Assembly and Senate, assembled in congress at Versailles, approved a project of constitutional review which noted the exceptional situation of New Caledonia and reintroduced the possibility that a territory might leave the French Republic. The change was approved with 827 votes for and 31 against. On this occasion, the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, made a point of specifying that the preamble to the Noumea Accord "does not constitute a renunciation by France of its action in New Caledonia since taking possession, still less does it call into question the legitimacy of populations who have settled there since then. It is a text of reconciliation".¹⁰ The next stage in the implementation of the Accord was the ratification referendum which took place on 8 November 1998. In spite of a call to vote "No" by several secondary parties, including some loyalists and some independentists, the "Yes" vote advocated by the two parties that signed the Accord with the State (RPCR and FLNKS) was carried massively by all communities. In March 1999, the Noumea Accord was finalised by an organic law containing 234 articles which develop and elaborate upon the guidance document of April 1998.¹¹

Although eventually implemented, the Noumea Accord was not uncontested. Opposition centred on the issue of local employment and the restricted electorate. As early as April 1998, certain local political parties made formal legal appeals against the Accord on two grounds: the freezing of the electorate for the "exit" referendum and the possibility of (positive) discrimination as regards local employment. Both appeals were dismissed but they showed the unease of recent arrivals from France who were concerned about being temporarily deprived of some of their civic rights as voters. Immigrants from French Polynesia, Vanuatu, and especially Wallis and Futuna were concerned about the possible reduction of labour immigration from these territories. The case of ni-Vanuatu is particularly delicate because, since Vanuatu

achieved independence in 1980, they must have work permits which are granted parsimoniously by the French embassy in Port Vila.

At the national level, Jospin was criticized on the issue of New Caledonians' "right" to employment (as set out in the Noumea Accord) which some compared with the policy of "national preference" advocated by the extreme right. Responding to these criticisms, Jospin declared in the daily newspaper, *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, that "The government is implementing a balanced policy of immigration, quite distinct from the 'national preference' which is a slogan for exclusion from economic and social rights.... What's the use of training New Caledonians if the jobs to which their training would normally give them access are taken by people from abroad?"¹²

The question of independence will persist ...

On a purely political level, it appears obvious that the question of independence will persist for as long as New Caledonia remains a part of the French Republic or as long as a fraction of the population disputes this situation. It should be noted, however, that the Noumea Accord does not use the word "independence" (only "full sovereignty") and it specifically states that the "exit" poll cannot lead to any division of the archipelago: "The result of the poll will apply comprehensively to New Caledonia as a whole. It will not be possible for one part of New Caledonia alone to achieve full sovereignty, or alone to retain different links with France, on the grounds that its results in the poll differed from the overall result". Thus, if a majority in favour of abandoning the last institutional ties with France were to emerge in 2014 or 2019, the Noumea Accord does not specify what steps could then be taken to attain independence. François Guard considers that in this case: "it is reasonable to think that the spirit, if not the letter, of article 53 of the Constitution applies, and the intervention of a law is needed to determine the exact date of independence and the various practical procedures for this".

LEARNING TO DEAL WITH AUTONOMY

The transfer of powers began unhurriedly in January 2000 with the creation of a territorial department of (primary) education. During a consensual press conference, its first director, a Caldoche teacher and National Education Inspector, announced that primary education

was finally going to take the plunge of adapting to local realities and, in particular, that the teaching of French as a second language was going to be introduced into many schools.¹⁴ However, each transfer involves a close examination of the administrative sector concerned and the drawing up, via a state-country convention, of a budget to meet the expenditure incurred by the new responsibilities. On this subject, lawyer Jeanne Page has noted that "transitory federalism" has not led to any development in comparison with the Territory's strong financial dependence on France. Only a big drop in the New Caledonian standard of living would guarantee financial independence and real autonomy.¹⁵ Styling himself as a "realistic Caledonian nationalist", the Vice-President of the recently formed *Fédération des Comités de Coordination des Indépendantistes* (FCCI), Léopold Jorédié, has said that: "Today, to speak of independence is to become a demagogue. It is a term which some still use to preserve their electoral goodwill, while knowing full well that the exercise of sovereignty has a price and that this price for the moment is mainly being paid by France. True independence is being able to pay this price."¹⁶

Economic development: "Growth" or "Building the Country"

Since the setting up of the new institutions provided for by the Noumea Accord, the main political parties have directed their energies towards large economic development projects. For the RPCR it is a question of ensuring growth and for the FLNKS it is about "building the country". Taking on the role of a constructive opposition, pro-independence leaders announced their willingness to facilitate the establishment of international companies on the condition that Kanak identity be respected and that Kanak chances of one day attaining independence be preserved. In 2001, Roch Wamytan, the FLNKS president, declared to the UN: "We must remain vigilant on rebalancing and major economic projects such as the [nickel] factory in the North and the Goro Nickel project. All these projects must give priority to the interests of the country and they should not enslave us in such a way that New Caledonia ends up under the thumb of the multinationals".¹⁷ The leader of the Kanak Liberation Party (PALIKA), Paul Neaoutyine, has wondered about the legitimacy of Western style development:

... everything we do as regards modern development consists of giving people the

means to change themselves. We even give them the means to mutate. But did the people in question make their own choices? And if they do not adhere to this integration, it will be pronounced a failure, but I say that this is resistance and that they have the right to be different....

In any case, there will always be a contradiction [between the two economic systems]. We brought people in, we built roads to give access to remote valleys, we supplied the reserves with electricity to encourage people to group together. We have spent millions and billions to bring modernity to people who want to remain in their corner without ever talking to them about going to town. So if we now push them to do the opposite, we will have to manage this new situation and all that goes with it: delinquency, the refusal of all that is not traditional.

As for mastering the tools of production, I do not think that all Kanak have to be integrated into the modern economy. It is enough that they have well-trained representatives who are placed where they are needed.¹⁸

Each province has defined its economic priorities according to its own policy guidelines. The Islands Province favours land-use planning, eco-tourism, and the development of commercial crops compatible with traditional social organisation. The North Province laid down four objectives: real economic advancement, restoration of the balance between the two coasts, the establishment of private companies to generate employment, and environmental protection. The South Province, where demographic pressure is intensifying, chose social housing, the integration of young people, and economic development as its priorities.

Today, the economy is playing to its strong points: stable institutions; 25% of the world's nickel reserves; an under-used Exclusive Economic Zone; infrastructures that are rare for insular Oceania; a high level of training; multiple aids for development; a high standard of living (partly enabled by major transfers from France); low inflation (2.3% in 2001); largely endemic fauna and flora; the largest closed lagoon in the world; and an agricultural industry relatively protected by its insularity. However, New Caledonia has also suffered from a slump in air services, a narrow domestic market, the multiplication of administrative powers, customs restrictions, an insufficient knowledge

of the English language, high labour costs, and politicisation of economic life. According to certain economists, "politicising something has perverse economic effects. To invest locally, it is often advisable to be well considered by whomsoever holds the political reins".¹⁹

Managing mining

The economic future will rest in the realization of at least one of four mining projects which are currently in various stages of development and competition. Perhaps the most promising of these is a joint venture between the State and INCO, a Canadian company, to build a new nickel plant at Goro in the South Province. At the same time, SLN-Eramet hopes to increase annual production at its Doniambo plant from 60,000 to 75,000 tons of nickel-metal by 2004. In the North Province, plans by the Falconbridge-SMSP consortium for a factory at Koniambo are well advanced. Lastly, the Ballande group hopes to interest Australian investors in a mining project in the Boulouparis area.

Since 1 July 2000, the signatories of the Noumea Accord (the RPCR, the FLNKS, and the French state), as well as the presidents of the three provinces, have created the Société Territoriale Calédonienne de Participation Industrielle (STCPI) in order to manage the shares of the SLN (30%) and Eramet (5.14%) which have been allocated to New Caledonia by the state. An original set up means that the South Province is a 50% shareholder (Promosud) and that the other two provinces jointly own the other 50% (Nordil), although the dividends are distributed to the provinces to a value of 50% for the North, 25% for the Islands and 25% for the South. In June 2002, the realization of the Goro Nickel mining project appeared assured. Indeed, all the earthworks had just been completed and New Caledonia had obtained a 5% stake in the capital of this company. Lastly, Goro Nickel had agreed to participate to the tune of AU\$1.5 million in a fund to promote Melanesian development in the South Province.

The New Caledonian economy is basically in good health though the problem of finding jobs for young adults entering the labour market remains. This explains the emphasis which the New Caledonian government and various trade unions have placed on the question of local employment. Some politicians have declared that access to employment, rather than independence, is the most important issue for the future.

THE PERPETUATION OF POLITICAL BIPOLARISATION

New Caledonian politics remain strongly polarized between the two political parties which were signatories to the Matignon and Noumea Accords: the FLNKS and the RPCR. Indeed, the priority which the electorate gives to the independence issue partly explains the failure of parties which have tried to present themselves as a third force on either the pro-independence (LKS, FCCI) or anti-independence side (Alliance, Front National) of the political spectrum. However, it appears that this bipolarisation as well as the RPCR-FLNKS "understanding" are diminishing because of civil peace, the priority given to economic or social questions by recently emerged parties, as well as the appearance of internal divisions within the FLNKS and, in a less visible way, the RPCR.

The various elections held since the Noumea Accord have delivered a vast majority to the RPCR. The RPCR controls the South Province, the Congress of New Caledonia, the collegial executive government, the Economic and Social Council and the majority of urban municipalities (Noumea, Mont-Dore, La Foa, Bourail). Consequently, the RPCR controls the public service and the publicly-owned territorial establishments. Parties belonging to the FLNKS run the North (PALIKA) and Islands (UC and PALIKA) Provinces, most of the small rural communities and the Customary Senate. The FLNKS has a minority of four seats in the eleven seat collegial government of New Caledonia (UC, 2; PALIKA, 1; Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien [RDO], 1) and has elected officials in all the local authorities. The secondary parties only control the municipalities of Dumbéa (Alliance) and Maré (LKS). The marginalisation of these parties is explained by the failure of their political programs as well as by their incomplete geographical representation.

Factionalism in the FLNKS ...

The internal dissension which is shaking up the FLNKS is particularly visible as it is a coalition of parties. In 2000, the majority party, the Union Calédonienne, split into two parliamentary groups following the ousting of the UC president, Bernard Lepeu, by Roch Wamytan. The UC's elected representatives split between Wamytan's supporters and his opponents, led by Pascal Naouna. In the 2001 municipal elections, the two UC factions presented separate lists. In Noumea, Wamytan's

UC introduced candidates on the list "Alternative Citoyenne" which brought together the parties of the FLNKS as well as progressive participants of civil society. In the annual elections for the UC president in 2001, Wamytan was deposed and replaced by Pascal Naouna. At the end of 2001 Wamytan also lost his position as president of the FLNKS. As the UC and the PALIKA were unable to agree on Wamytan's replacement, the FLNKS currently does not have a president.

It appears that the Union Calédonienne, in particular, is going through a period of internal conflict and self-doubt regarding both its leadership and its position within the FLNKS. In June 2002, the UC not only refused to take part in elections for the French National Assembly but called for an electoral boycott by its supporters. This removed any chance that the PALIKA president, Paul Néaoutyine, might have had of winning in the second constituency.²⁰ Relations have greatly deteriorated between the PALIKA, a small party with a socialist agenda and some of New Caledonia's youngest leaders, and the UC which is strongly supported by the Christian churches.

... and in the RPCR

Within the RPCR, such cracks are less obvious, despite claims made by its political adversaries. The principal issue within the RPCR is the question of who will succeed its president, Jacques Lafleur. Lafleur has two possible successors. In his autobiography published in 2000, Lafleur indicated that Pierre Frogier was best suited to replace him when that time should come.²¹ Another possible successor was the mayor of Païta, Harold Martin, who in March 2001 refused to give up his place at the head of the RPCR list for the local elections in Païta. Martin was re-elected as mayor in defiance of Lafleur but has now lost his place within the RPCR. Martin may decide to create his own party before the 2004 provincial elections.

It may be that the exercise of power consumes all majority parties but it seems that the RPCR will retain a central place in local politics for a long time, though its adversaries continue to hope that it will fall apart upon Lafleur's retirement. After the 2002 elections for the French National Assembly, the media noted that the two RPCR candidates, Lafleur and Frogier, had to wait until the second round to be elected and that there had been as many protest votes in the first round as in the second round. RPCR officials countered that many French MPs would be happy to be elected with

majorities of 55.74% (Lafleur's vote in the first constituency) or 55.71% (Frogier's vote in the second constituency). Lafleur stated his position during the parliamentary elections: "I want to think, imagine, and work on the institutional future. I want to stabilize our assets. I also want to accompany these fine men and women who have worked with me for a long time, to achieve with them the organisation of a true changeover".²²

Wallisian and Futunan communities

Voting in the last elections suggests that 65% of New Caledonians wish to remain within the French Republic; only 35% favoured independence parties. These community votes are not likely to change, except perhaps within the Wallisian and Futunan communities which account for 10% of the electorate. Until now, they have always voted massively in favour of New Caledonia remaining a part of France but a small party representing this electorate, the RDO, has joined the FLNKS. Although the RDO is a minor party, the FLNKS appointed one of its officials, Tino Manuohalala, to a position within the executive government. In the legislative elections of June 2002, PALIKA formed an official alliance with the RDO. The two PALIKA candidates were Kanak, but their substitutes were Wallisians from the RDO.

At present such rapprochements remain superficial and in the municipality of Mont Dore there has been an intense and violent conflict between communities from Wallis and Futuna, settled at Ave Maria, and their Kanak neighbours at Saint-Louis. Since the 1980s, people from Wallis and Futuna have settled at Ave Maria in quite large numbers – initially encouraged by the RPCR which hoped to bolster the anti-independence vote. In 2001, repeated incidents between young people from the two communities led the Kanak at Saint-Louis to ask for the departure of the whole Polynesian community at Ave Maria. In late 2001, road blocks were set up on the nearby territorial road and there were incidents of stone throwing, brawls, exchanges of rifle-fire, and clashes with gendarmes. In January 2002, a young Kanak, Jean-Marie Goyetta, was killed and in April working groups were set up to find solutions to the problem. By May 2002, 39 out of the 127 Polynesian families at Ave Maria had been relocated to social housing. On 12 June, a 36 year-old Futunian, Petelo Motuku, was killed as he drove to work. A Wallisian community leader, Alain Palagaloa, gave a voice to the silent majority by declaring that: "If Petelo's assassination is the price to be paid

for peace to return to Saint-Louis, then he won't have died for nothing".²³

As for the future, it is obvious that political developments will depend on many factors, such as individual leaders, the economic situation, and the French government. No political analyst can foresee the direction that New Caledonians will choose to take. It should be noted that in 2001 the French law on parity obliged political parties to open town councils up to women and in the 2004 provincial elections it will impose an equal number of male and female candidates on party lists. This measure could involve a remarkable transformation in the structure and hence the thinking of the pro-independence parties which have traditionally been run by men.

CONCLUSIONS

Different visions of the future

In conclusion, it appears that any discussion of the political situation in New Caledonia must take a variety of factors into consideration. At the local level, two years after the beginning of the transfer of powers, it is too early to forecast either the failure or success of the Noumea Accord. Some journalists regard the Accord as "a peaceful process of decolonisation". Others see it as a "masterpiece of semantic tightrope walking" that will collapse at the first sign of conflict.²⁴ While the three parties to the Accord were able to come to a consensual agreement in 1998, it is also the case that the FLNKS and the RPCR have very different visions of New Caledonia's institutional future. On 5 May 1998 the *Nouvelles Calédoniennes* reported the remarks of the two men who made the Noumea Accord possible. Lafleur reiterated "his hope that the consultation to be organized in twenty years 'will favour the maintenance of New Caledonia within the Republic'". For Wamytan and the FLNKS, "it is clear, we have entered an evolutionary process at the end of which the Territory will reach its political emancipation".²⁵ The text of the Noumea Accord is thus open to at least three different readings for the future: full and complete internal autonomy, total independence, or emancipation within the French Republic.

New Caledonian citizenship?

On a French national level, the case of New Caledonia is not only unique but may have a gradual domino effect on political thinking amongst politicians in other French territories

as well as amongst Anglo-Saxon political scientists. The Noumea Accord has breached the Parisian vision of a unitary and centralizing State. The principle of the indivisibility of the French Republic has been brushed aside by an institutional solution which envisages the sharing of sovereignty and the more or less complete emancipation of New Caledonia. Furthermore, it introduces a federative concept of the Republic. The introduction of a "New Caledonian citizenship", for example, implicitly refers to a national sovereignty in preparation.²⁶ As Delphine Caussin has reminded us: "Pushed to the limit, this phenomenon of decentralization and new relations between the State and territorial organisations is part of a more general process of change in the unitary State and current society".²⁷ Moreover, a prime-ministerial adviser on New Caledonia has acknowledged that the new statute constitutes a "legal category without precedent". If French Polynesians, West-Indians, or even Corsicans were to be swallowed up in this institutional breach, instead of taking fright, then should it not be possible to build new relationships between the European Union, its member States, and more-or-less emancipated overseas organisations?²⁸

Internationally, an optimistic grasp of political realities in New Caledonia has encouraged multinational mining companies to invest billions of (Canadian) dollars locally. Economists are already anticipating that the future realization of one, two, or even three mining projects will herald a new economic state of affairs. If these projects come to fruition, then might not New Caledonian politics in the next decade be profoundly altered by the resulting changes in social conditions – as was the case during the mining boom of 1969-1972?

AUTHOR NOTE

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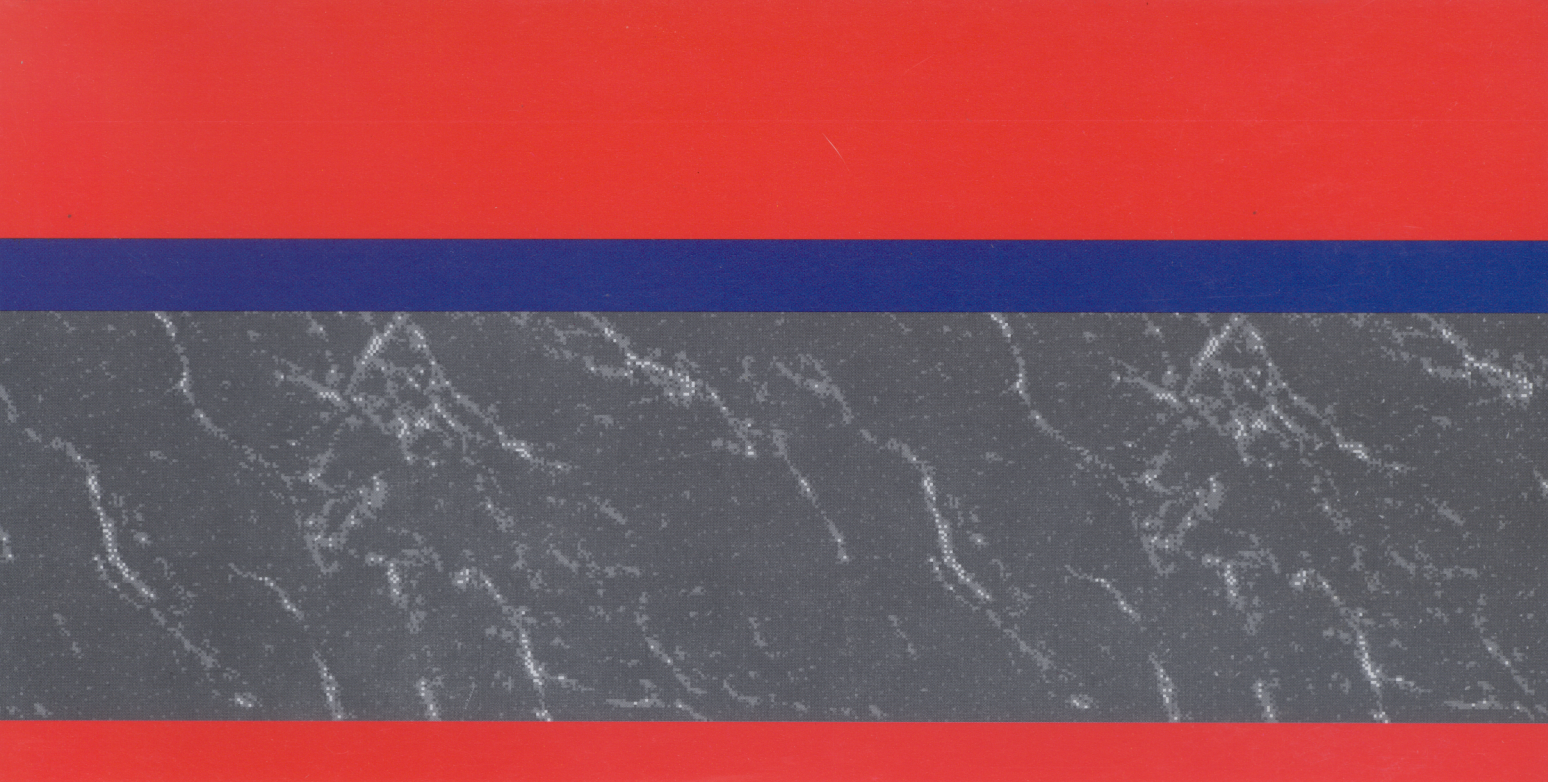
[*Editor's postscript:* Since this paper was submitted in June 2002, there have been a number of developments which fall within its scope. The future of the various mining projects remains in flux: in December 2002, Inco announced that the Goro Nickel project would be paused for six months while it reviewed costs. The FLNKS remains without a President and relations between the FLNKS and RPCR members of the "collegial" executive have been further strained following a decision by the RPCR majority to move the executive into offices adjacent to those of the RPCR-controlled South Province. In November 2002, the UC forced the resignation of the territorial government by withdrawing its representative from the executive. A new, but smaller, executive of ten members was elected in its place (RPCR and FCCI, 7; FLNKS, 3). As a result, the FCCI lost one of its two members and Aukusitino Manuohalalo, the RDO member on the FLNKS list, was replaced by Roch Wamytan. In December 2002, Lafleur announced his "programmed retirement" from political life (*Le Monde*, 27 December 2002). A degree of calm has been restored at Saint Louis but conflicts relating to land disputes between members of Kanak clans at Houailou and Touho have resulted in a number of arrests and court cases.]

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NOTES

- ¹ Editor's note: Two separate agreements, the Matignon Accord (26 June 1988) and the Oudinot Accord (20 August 1998), are collectively referred to as the "Matignon Accords".
- ² *Le Monde*, 1 July 1988. In 1988 Léopold Jorédié was the deputy mayor of Canala. He later became President of the North Province (1989-1999).
- ³ See Articles 2 and 80 of the Loi no. 88-1028, 9 November 1988.
- ⁴ Michel Rocard, "Lettre au Professeur Faberon", in *L'avenir statutaire de la Nouvelle-Calédonie: l'évolution des liens de la France avec ses collectivités périphériques* (Paris: Documentation Française, 1997), 8; Michel Rocard, *Entretien* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).
- ⁵ Dorothée Dussy, "Les squats de Nouméa: des occupations océaniques spontanées à la conquête symbolique de la ville en Nouvelle-Calédonie", *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 103 (1996):275-87; Atu Emberson-Bain, "The downside of Matignon – squatting in Kanaky", in *Sustainable development or malignant growth? Perspectives of Pacific Island women* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1994), 213-17.
- ⁶ Le congrès de l'Union Calédonienne, Poindimié, 1996.
- ⁷ Delphine Caussin, Semi-selective interview with H. Martin (former member of the RPCR and president of the congress), December 1997, in "La Nouvelle-Calédonie à l'épreuve de la contestation kanak" (Thesis in Political Science, Université de Nice, 1998), 556.
- ⁸ For the full text of the Noumea Accord, see Online, <<http://www.gouv.nc/AccordNea.htm>>.
- ⁹ See Article 218 of "Loi N°99-209 du 19 mars 1999 organique relative à la Nouvelle-Calédonie", *Journal officiel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 24 March 1999, 1182-1210.
- ¹⁰ *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 6 May 1998.
- ¹¹ For the full text of the 1999 organic law, see Online, <<http://www.gouv.nc/Publications/Loi%2099-209.pdf>>
- ¹² "Un entretien exclusif du Premier Ministre avec Les *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*", *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 4 May 1998. Online, <<http://www.lnc.nc/19980504/Articles/40014.htm>>.
- ¹³ François Garde, *Les institutions de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001), 98. [Editor's note: Article 53 of the French Constitution states that treaties "that involve the cession, exchange or addition of territory, may be ratified or approved only by virtue of an Act of Parliament". It also states that "No cession, exchange or addition of territory shall be valid without the consent of the population concerned". Online, <<http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/textes/c1958web.htm>>.]
- ¹⁴ Géraldine Feyeux, "Une nouvelle méthode pour enseigner le français", *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 10 March 2000.
- ¹⁵ Jeanne Page, "Du partage des compétences au partage de la souveraineté: des territoires d'outre-mer aux 'pays d'outre-mer'" (Thesis in Law, Université d'Aix-Marseille, 2000).
- ¹⁶ *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 19 April 2000.
- ¹⁷ Cited in Anne Pitoiset, "Le rêve métallurgique prend forme", *Calédonie Eco: l'atlas économique du territoire 2* (2002):6.
- ¹⁸ Paul Néaoutyine, "Les Kanak dans l'économie: entretien avec Paul Néaoutyine", *Mwà Vée: Revue culturelle kanak* 32 (2001):9, 12.
- ¹⁹ *Calédonie Eco: l'atlas économique du territoire 2* (2002):18.
- ²⁰ Editor's note: New Caledonia is represented by two deputies in the French National Assembly. Both current deputies are members of the RPCR.
- ²¹ Jacques Lafleur, *L'assiégé: 25 ans de vie politique* (Paris: Plon, 2000), 20.
- ²² Elisabeth Nouar, "Une interview de Jacques Lafleur", *Nouvel Hebdo*, 6 June 2002.
- ²³ Fredière, Philippe, "Les obsèques de la victime de Saint-Louis", *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 14 June 2002. [Editor's note: There have been several other serious incidents at Saint-Louis, including one in early April 2002 when a senior gendarme was shot and seriously wounded near a roadblock. Later in April, a man from Saint-Louis was killed in an accident with a firearm. Stone-throwing and exchanges of gunfire were still regularly occurring in the area in July 2002.]
- ²⁴ Jean Chatain, "Les accords de Nouméa prennent force de loi", *L'Humanité*, 7 July 1998; Eric Conan, "La Nouvelle-Calédonie: le Caillou constitutionnel", *L'Express*, 2 July 1998.
- ²⁵ *Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 5 May 1998.
- ²⁶ NN, "Editorial. Kanaks souverains", *Le Monde*, 23 April 1998. According to the editorialist, "Citizenship is a republican value which supposes national sovereignty and implies economic, social, and political responsibility without division in a territory".
- ²⁷ Delphine Caussin, op. cit., 481; François Garde, "Existe-il un modèle calédonien?", in *Identité, nationalité, citoyenneté Outre-Mer* (Paris: Documentation Française, 1999), 209-18.
- ²⁸ J.-Y. Faberon, "Comparer la Corse et la Nouvelle-Calédonie", *Revue politique et parlementaire*, 1009-1010 (2001):72-78; "Nouvelle-Calédonie: les difficultés d'un gouvernement constitué à la représentation proportionnelle", in *AJDA* (Paris, 2002), 113-17.



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