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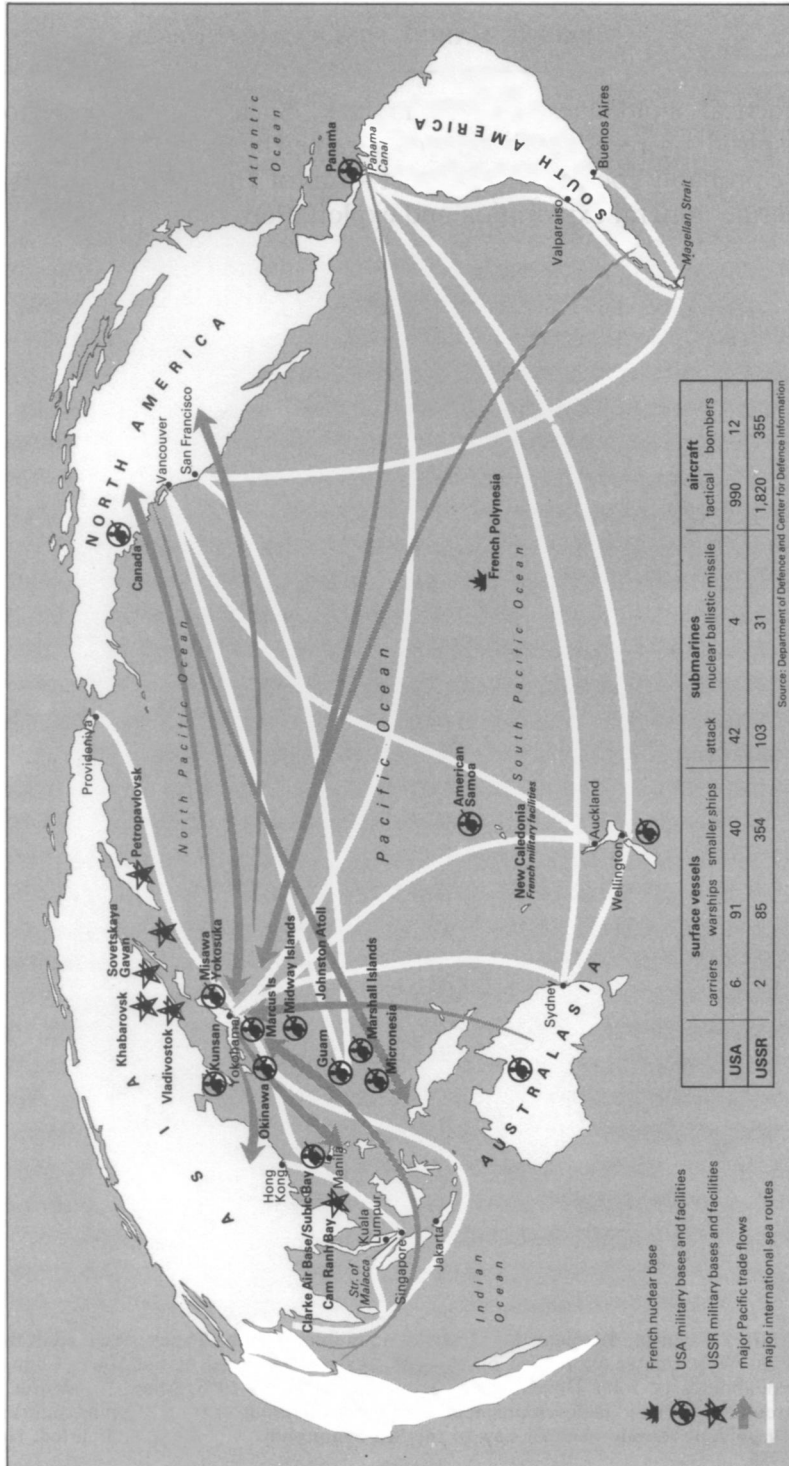
## New Caledonia: decolonisation and denuclearisation in the Pacific

In 1984 the 320 people living in the tiny atoll of Rongelap in the central Pacific Ocean next to the atolls of Bikini and Enewetak, where the United States had tested at least sixty-six nuclear devices between 1946 and 1954, decided that they must leave their island. What they read in the reports of the US Government health services about the irradiation of their soils and their bodies confirmed what they could see around them in their ancestral home. Like the people of Bikini and Enewetak, they decided—thirty years after the last atomic tests—that they must become nuclear nomads.

The people of Rongelap looked for a place to go and a vessel to take them there with as many of their belongings as they could remove. The US government was unhelpful and it was hard to find a vessel large enough for the purpose. Eventually, the Greenpeace organisation of environmental protectionists offered their vessel, *Rainbow Warrior*. The relocation took place in May 1985. From the US Trust Territory of the Marshall Islands the *Rainbow Warrior* sailed south to New Zealand to refit and to protest against French nuclear testing in neighbouring French Polynesia. It was rumoured that the French were about to test a neutron bomb at their Mururoa Atoll testing site, despite long-standing regional complaints from Australia, New Zealand and other South Pacific states against nuclear testing in the Pacific.

On 10 July 1985 two explosions sank the 160-foot *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour killing one crew-member and missing the executive leadership of the Greenpeace organisation only by chance. Three months of investigation made it impossible for the French Government to deny that it was responsible for an act of state terrorism perpetrated in another sovereign country which was in the middle of a difficult struggle to resist the requirements of its allies that it accept a nuclear-based regional defence.

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Even as the French were resorting to terrorist tactics to protect their nuclear testing programme from environmental and political critics, the Americans were facing problems from the communities living on the islands that they consider essential to their nuclear defence programmes.

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was established from the former Japanese-controlled Micronesian islands in 1947 and was designated the only Strategic Trust by the UN in recognition of its vital importance to the defence of the US west coast. After forty years of neglect, characterised even by American administrations as benign and by their critics as malign, this last trusteeship has become an embarrassment to the US. Wishing to escape the charge of neo-colonialism, the US nevertheless does not wish to lose control over this vast Pacific territory, and most particularly it needs to retain its absolute control of the missile testing-base on Kwajalein Atoll. Moreover, with the prospect of a post-Marcos Philippines looming as large on security horizons as the loss of Iran, the US is emphatic that it needs to retain control of the deep harbour capacity of the island of Palau as a potential replacement for the facilities at Subic Bay.

The US solution to this dilemma is to foist on the peoples of Micronesia a spurious form of decolonisation in which they would acquire the trappings of statehood but be as effectively deprived of the substance—control over their foreign affairs and defence and control over their fiscal affairs (which would be dependent on continued appropriations from the US)—as the bantustans of South Africa. The terms of this so-called ‘compact of free association’ have been placed before the peoples of the four micro-entities of Micronesia over the past five years. One entity, the Northern Marianas, opted for commonwealth status with the US on the lines of Puerto Rico. The other three entities will not have sufficient international personality in legal terms to join the UN if the US is permitted to terminate the trusteeship. Yet termination will relieve the US of having to submit its administration of this buffer zone (which contains the ‘single most important missile range we have in the entire world’ according to Congressman Stephen Solarz) to the scrutiny of the Security Council, currently consisting of the Soviet Union, France, Britain and the United States.

The great hold-out among the Micronesian communities in refusing to accept ‘associated status’ with the US on terms including acceptance of the nuclear defence has been Palau. The 8,000 voters of the total

population of 15,000 have repeatedly refused to amend their Constitution's 'nuclear-free' clause to enable the introduction of nuclear substances, weapons or ships in their land, sea or air space. In fact, the people of Palau have voted five times on this issue in various forums, because the US will not recognise their commitment to a nuclear-free territory in the light of what they have seen happen at Bikini, Enewetak and Rongelap. The frustration of both sides, American and Palauan, was reflected in the first political murder in post-war Palau, that of pro-Compact President Haruo Remeliik ten days before the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior*. The American press has not been as assiduous as the French media in investigating this assassination, but whoever actually fired the four bullets that killed President Remeliik, the end result was very satisfactory to the US with the election of the Palauan in charge of Compact negotiations, Lazarus Salii, as the new President in August 1985.

Meanwhile, at the Kwajalein Missile Base in another Micronesian entity, the Marshall Islands, the traditional landowners who saw their land and lagoon seized for US testing of missiles fired from Vandenberg Air Base in California used Greenpeace-type tactics to organise disruptive 'sail-ins' back to their own atolls in protest against the terms on which they have been dislocated. Even if the Marshall Islands government should accede to 'associated status' there is no prospect of the US relinquishing this strategic base which, like US bases in Cuba<sup>1</sup> and Puerto Rico, constitutes effective seizure by eminent domain in perpetuity.

The US and France, then, find themselves in remarkably similar predicaments in the South Pacific. Having established nuclear weapons-testing programmes there that they consider critical, they now find that the rising tides of Micronesian and Melanesian nationalism are bringing their defence activities in the region into a most unwanted limelight. And this at a time when the major inheritors of the British intrusion into the Pacific of two centuries ago, Australia and New Zealand, are increasingly apprehensive about the price they may be required to pay for what they used to think of as a protective alliance.

<sup>1</sup> In 1903 a site covering 28,000 acres at Guantanamo Bay was leased to the US as a naval station by the Cuban Government; the lease was renewed in 1934. Since 1960 the Castro Government has refused to accept the token \$5,000 annual rent and has pressured for the surrender of the base, but the terms of the lease—as for the Micronesian sites—requires consent of both governments to revoke and is therefore in effect in perpetuity. The fully sovereign government of Cuba cannot dislodge the US military installation which is often called the 'Pearl Harbor of the Atlantic.'

The changing attitudes of Australia and New Zealand to US and French military presence in the South Pacific demonstrates Disraeli's remark that yesterday's extremists are today's moderates. In September 1985 the *New York Times* published an overview of Australia by its managing editor, Seymour Topping. He reported as received wisdom views that five or ten years ago would have been considered views of the far left; namely, that because of its hosting of US satellite surveillance and communications facilities, Australia was rendered vulnerable to Soviet aggression. Yet the irony is that as Prime Minister Robert Hawke is a far more cautious critic of the ANZUS alliance or French nuclear testing than he was in opposition or as leader of the trade union movement. In 1973 Hawke led an ACTU (Australian Council of Trade Unions) boycott of French goods and communications in protest against French nuclear testing in the Pacific. But ten years later Prime Minister Hawke sponsored a nuclear-free zone scheme to the South Pacific Forum<sup>2</sup> which, while it seeks to outlaw nuclear testing in the region would accept passage of such weapons through the region by air or sea with the necessary port calls.

However, New Zealand's Prime Minister, David Lange, leads a Labour Party strongly opposed to all aspects of the nuclear defence involved in the ANZUS alliance. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1985) Lange noted:

New Zealanders have felt an increasing sense of frustration and concern that progress in bringing the nuclear arms race under control had been minimal overall and in recent years nonexistent. This concern has been heightened by the growing realization that, despite its physical isolation, New Zealand would not escape the consequences of a nuclear conflict. Anti-nuclear sentiment has also been fanned by French intransigence in persisting with its nuclear testing program in the South Pacific, in defiance of the expressed views of countries in the region.

That intransigence was reflected by France's repudiation of the World Court decision in the action brought by Australia and New Zealand a decade ago when France held that it was not bound by the statements of mere politicians. The sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* in

<sup>2</sup> The South Pacific Forum was formed in 1971 as a regional voice. It held its sixteenth meeting in August 1985 at Raratonga in the Cook Islands. The Forum consists of the island states of the South Pacific together with Australia and New Zealand. It has vigorously opposed Japanese plans to dump low-level nuclear waste in the Pacific, and at Raratonga declared the South Pacific a nuclear-free zone. However, Australia effectively protected the desire of the US to retain transit rights for nuclear vessels and substances, which are being opposed by New Zealand and several other states. The South Pacific Forum is united in its opposition to French nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Auckland at the height of New Zealand's dispute with the US over its refusal to accept nuclear vessels can only have hardened the New Zealanders' resolve not to become party to the disputes of the northern hemisphere.

But Australians and New Zealanders are not able to feel complacent about their relationship with their regional neighbours either. When Vanuatu came to independence from both Britain and France, the Hon. Walter Lini told the 'landowning' cultures of Australia and New Zealand that if confrontation is to be avoided with the 'landusing' cultures of the Pacific, future relationships are going to depend 'on a practical acknowledgement that our new-found freedoms were fought for, to a significant degree, in order that a renaissance of Melanesian values, principles and expectations could take place.' (*Australian Outlook*, August 1982, p 29.)

The one issue that cuts through the normal timidity of Papua New Guinea's foreign policies is that of the Melanesian renaissance. The Papua New Guinea delegation has manoeuvred itself into a leadership role in the Decolonisation Committee of the UN in recent years. As the last Trust to be terminated by the Trusteeship Council, Papua New Guinea is assiduous in monitoring the extraordinary procedures of the current Trusteeship Council as Britain, France and the US try to impose virtual bantustan status on the people of Micronesia.

These regional tensions and ambivalences about French and American militarisation of the Pacific are reflected in the dynamics of the South Pacific Forum. Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Nauru, Kiribati and Tuvalu, and the dependent territories of Niue and the Cook Islands annually try to agree levels of militarisation that they will accept. Australia has played the role of apologist for the US interest during the Labour Governments of both Whitlam and Hawke. It is thus at odds with New Zealand which has long been a proponent of full denuclearisation of the Pacific. Fiji has been ambivalent on the issue, banning nuclear-capable vessels in 1982 but subsequently reversing this position under US pressure. Vanuatu is the Young Turk of the Pacific, and has been the main and often the only friend of Melanesian independence movements.

Meeting in Tuvalu in 1984, the South Pacific Forum accepted an Australian proposal that would ban the use, testing or stationing of nuclear explosive devices in the South Pacific but left to each sovereign nation the decision whether or not to permit transit of such weapons and

nuclear-powered vessels within their land, sea and air space. This suits the US which is currently not testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific, although it is testing missile-delivery systems at Kwajalein. It does not suit the French who have their nuclear weapons testing installation on Muroroa in French Polynesia. But French and American territories are in any case excised from the Australian-proposed Zone. This essentially gutless South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone was endorsed as a treaty by the 1985 South Pacific Forum at Rarotonga in the Cook Islands. As well as being a victory for the Americans and French on the denuclearisation issue, the Forum also comforted the French by refusing to accept French Polynesia's request for observer status. The Forum also accepted French promises to hold an Act of Self-Determination in New Caledonia by the end of 1987 at face value, decided not to embark on a campaign to have New Caledonia 'reinscribed' in the list of territories under the authority of the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation at the Fortieth General Assembly.

Australia, with the help of New Zealand (whose Prime Minister Lange is far less sympathetic to Kanak demands for independence than he is to the call for a nuclear-free Pacific) succeeded in blocking, for 1985 at least, efforts by Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to mount the major diplomatic campaign that is essential if the Kanak people are to be given a true opportunity to determine their future before the end of this decade. It is within this context that we must evaluate the prospects for Kanak nationalism in New Caledonia. The Socialist Party leader and a former Minister for Overseas Territories, Francois Mitterrand, told the French Parliament on 23 November 1979:

We have had enough experience, over the last quarter of a century, of the problems of decolonisation to know how desperate, and then how angry, peoples can become when they do not know where to turn, or when, knowing where to turn—in other words to the French government—they find neither interest, nor vigilance, nor consideration, nor understanding. We are now approaching a situation of desperation which, mark my words, will lead to confrontation.

Now, no doubt you will tell me that the Kanaka population in New Caledonia is, ethnically speaking, in the minority. That may be so, but such arguments are not valid when one remembers how immigration from both metropolitan France and from neighbouring countries has been encouraged. What has to be taken into account is that all the Pacific countries, including Australia, have, after being consulted by the *Front Independantiste*, backed their claim to independence. We are going to face a situation that would well, I feel, become extremely tense and possibly dangerous. To what degree should



the claims of the *Front Indépendantiste* be met? I leave that for you to judge. We in the Socialist Party have already made up our minds.

The Kanakas, who in 1979 constituted only 42 per cent of the population of this cigar-shaped island that has been part of the French domain in the Pacific since 1853, did mark Mr Mitterrand's words. In May 1981 they supported him in the Presidential elections that brought the Socialist Party to power in France, while the European constituencies in New Caledonia voted overwhelmingly for Giscard d'Estaing. Five years later, however, it is very clear to both Frenchmen and Kanaks that the Socialist Party has not in fact made up its mind about whether the call for independence in New Caledonia can or should be met.

The French are not eager to divest themselves of their empire in the Pacific—the five archipelagos of French Polynesia, the Wallis and Futuna Islands, and New Caledonia, 750 miles east of Australia—at a time when the Pacific Basin is viewed as having some of the strongest economies in the world. While the mineral wealth of New Caledonia—its nickel, chrome, iron, manganese and cobalt—is subject to market fluctuations, the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone of New Caledonia waters is yet untapped.

Strategically, New Caledonia is an important potential backstop for the *Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique* on Mururoa Atoll in French Polynesia. All post-war French governments have been committed to an independent nuclear capability for France, *une force de frappe*, the greatest strain in Franco-American relations. In 1960 the Algerian crisis forced the French nuclear-testing programme to move from the Sahara to the Pacific. France exploded forty-one nuclear bombs into the Pacific atmosphere between 1966 and 1975, when protests from neighbouring Fiji, Australia and New Zealand forced the programmes to move to underwater testing at Mururoa Atoll, despite its highly porous and brittle coral and basalt composition. At least forty-four bombs have been detonated under the atoll, including, according to President Giscard in 1980, prototypes of a neutron bomb. Although the advent of a Socialist government in Paris in May 1981 led to trade union protests among the more than 3,000 technicians on Mururoa about safety (there were two major accidents in July 1979, and hurricanes were alleged to have washed nuclear wastes off the atoll in 1981) the Mitterrand Government has shown no inclination to curtail the French nuclear development programme.

The French maintain an estimated 3,000 troops in French Polynesia

and a full complement of marines, paratroopers, naval and air forces 2,500 miles away at New Caledonia. The two garrisons are mutually reinforcing, and stand ready to be rapidly deployed to any flashpoint in French territories or those of France's allies in the Pacific. New Caledonia was a very important base for the US and Allied forces during World War II.

As well as its strategic interests, the French government wishes to protect those of its antipodean citizens. In his Brazzaville speech of 1944, de Gaulle had envisioned a community of French territories based on free contractual association. Immediately after the war the terms of this contract were specified in the French Union of 1946. Some colonies became overseas provinces, others overseas territories or associated territories. All indigenous inhabitants of overseas lands associated with France were granted French citizenship. The Socialist government of 1955 enacted the *loi cadre* ten years later in which the overseas territories were given an opportunity to opt for independence or continued contractual association with France. Only Guinea opted for independence in the 1956 referendum. New Caledonia became an Overseas Territory. Because of the 1956 act of choice, France was able to argue in the nascent UN Committee on Decolonisation that its remaining dependencies had willingly chosen a contractual association with the metropole, and therefore ought not to be inscribed on the list of territories that were not yet self-governing or decolonised. The Kanak call for independence challenges the French argument that it is not a colonial power.

A hundred years ago there were 10,000 French convicts in New Caledonia under the control of 5,000 of their fellow Frenchmen. Before the Europeans arrived, it is estimated that the Kanak population numbered between 50,000 and 70,000. In 1982, the Kanak population was 64,300 or 44.6 per cent of the population of 144,000. The first official French count of the Kanak population in 1887 estimated their numbers at 42,500. Twenty-four years later, in 1911, there were only 28,800 Kanaks. Disease, alcohol and missionary-advocated monogamy had combined to reduce the indigenous population by one-third in the first half-century of European presence.

The size of the Kanak population remained stable—without growth but without marked decrease either—until World War II. New Caledonia's 15,000 Frenchmen overwhelmingly supported de Gaulle, and New Caledonia was a very important Allied base during the Pacific war. The Kanaks were 54 per cent of the population at the outbreak of

the war, Europeans 29 per cent and people from other islands such as Wallis and Futuna, west of Samoa and north of Fiji, amounted to 17 per cent. Since both the European and Kanak populations had remained stable at approximately 15,000 and 29,000 respectively, all the growth in New Caledonia's population was in these immigrant groups from other Pacific islands who had come to the *Grande Terre* looking for work. These immigrant workers have always identified their interests with those of the Europeans who owned the enterprises—particularly the nickel-mining and grazing lands—in which they came to work.

The arrival of the American forces during World War II precipitated a boom in construction and services. As a result, the 1956 Census reported a 40 per cent increase in the European population to 25,160 while the Kanak population increased by only 33 per cent to 41,190. There had been considerable emigration of the other islanders during the war years, so that Kanaks were 51 per cent of the population in 1956 and Europeans 36 per cent. This was the last time that the Kanaks were a majority in their own land.

The *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* (Paris) reported that 80 per cent of the 25,160 Europeans in New Caledonia in 1956 had been born there, but more than one-third of these locally born Europeans (*Caldoches*) were under fifteen years old. That is to say that of the 20,128 *Caldoches* in New Caledonia thirty years ago, one third were children in 1956. Broadly speaking, the number of Europeans of voting age in 1985 who were born in New Caledonia is probably about 30,000.

But the European population in New Caledonia rose steadily during those intervening thirty years. In the 1960s the European population increased by 5,000 more than the natural increase of the Kanak population. The rate of growth of the European population in the 1960s was exactly twice that of the Kanaks. But the number of immigrants from other islands also redressed the losses of the war years, so that by the end of the 1960s the Kanaks constituted only 45 per cent of the population of their own land; Europeans had broken the 40 per cent level, and people from other islands were 14 per cent of the population of New Caledonia.

The population of New Caledonia on 23 April 1974 was 131,655, an increase of nearly 31 per cent since March, 1969. The *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* noted in its official report of the 1974 Census that:

This remarkable increase is explained partly by the natural rate of increase in

the Territory, but essentially by immigration which has attained a spectacular level in the years 1970–74 in the wake of the development of mining production and economic development.

This was despite a crisis in the nickel market which led to net emigration in 1973. The Institute further noted:

The consequences of this immigration during the period 1969–1972 on the distribution of the population by ethnic origin appeared clearly. It is evident in a perceptible diminution in the *preponderance of the Melanesians* who represent only 40.8 per cent of the total population, despite an effective total of nearly 54,000 people; a marked increase in Europeans (39.2 per cent) and other ethnicities (20 per cent).

The Institute also noted the dramatic increase in the population of Noumea, the capital city, which passed 59,000 and was 44.8 per cent of the population in 1974, a 41 per cent increase since 1969. The Institute attributed this growth in Noumea to a number of causes:

The settlement in the capital of more than 95 per cent of the immigrants arriving in the territory in the period 1969–74; the attraction, growing stronger and stronger, of Noumea for Melanesians looking for salaried work, in particular those coming from the Loyalty Islands; and the maintenance of a high birth-rate.

The concentration of the population around the capital city was reflected in the 86 per cent increase in the populations of Noumea's three neighbouring satellite communes, Mont Dore, Dumbea and Paita. More than half of New Caledonia's population lived in these four districts by 1974.

The European population actually decreased by 825 before the next count in 1976 but the number of people who were neither Kanak nor European had almost doubled since 1969 to 26,878. By 1976 the population was approximately 40 per cent Kanak; 40 per cent European and 20 per cent other islanders. The Institute reported that of the 50,000 Europeans, 30,500 had been born in New Caledonia, 14,500 in metropolitan France, and 2,300 in Africa of whom about 1,000 were from Algeria, and there were another 1,000 Europeans from countries other than France, particularly Italy. The Institute pointed out in its 1976 report that:

Immigration has constituted an important demographic factor since a quarter of the people counted in New Caledonia were not born there. This immigration has been especially important from 1969 to 1976. The flows of the previous six years have been very important. They have been composed on the one part by the massive arrival of workers attracted by the development activity in the

territory and on the other by the groups of civil servants and military people who stay for 2, 3 or 6 years in the Territory. The figures for 1975 and 1976 are particularly swelled by the 1200 soldiers come to do their national service in New Caledonia. The record years remain 1970 and 1971 when nearly 7000 people emigrated to the Territory. The professions most frequent among the immigrants are business and the military.

The Institute indicated that 70 per cent of the 20,527 Europeans born outside the Territory had arrived in 1969 or later; 60 per cent of the external-born population of all ethnic groups arrived since 1969. Only 7 per cent of the external-born inhabitants of New Caledonia in 1976 had arrived in the territory prior to 1950.

By 1982 the total population of New Caledonia was 144,000. The Kanaks were 45 per cent of the total, having increased by 13,543 people. The total other population had actually decreased by 10,767 but the Kanaks were a minority in their own land. The nickel industry—owned by metropolitan French interests—was in a severe recession. Paris was making up nearly 30 per cent of receipts for the Territory's budget by 1984 largely as a subsidy during the nickel slump and to support a major programme of primary education for the Kanak people. The central government was infusing more than twice the locally generated revenues, and its total commitment, including military, to the economy was estimated at US\$250 million annually.

A hundred years ago, in 1878, the Kanaks had revolted against the French Governor's seizure of their lands. Two thousand Kanaks and 200 Frenchmen died in that revolt. It was not until 1946 that the Statute on Native Peoples was lifted and the Kanaks were no longer used as forced labour, and acquired the right to move outside the reservations without government permission. New Caledonia gained the right to elect representatives to the French Parliament, and one thousand Kanaks became eligible to vote because of their service in the French Armed Forces. In 1958 New Caledonia voted to become an Overseas Territory by accepting the Constitution of the Fifth Republic in the first election conducted on the basis of universal suffrage.

Executive power was vested in the High Commissioner appointed from Paris. The 36-member Territorial Assembly was permitted to debate and approve the budget submitted by the administration, and to 'express its desires' on issues beyond that narrow jurisdiction. The High Commissioner presided over weekly meetings of the Governing Council, whose seven members were elected by the Territorial Assembly.

But by 1979 neighbouring New Hebrides was moving uneasily to independence from both Britain and France. President Giscard d'Estaing tried to pre-empt the growing autonomy demands in New Caledonia with 'A Long Term Plan for New Caledonia's Economic and Social Development' which came to be known after its advocate, the Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories, Paul Dijoud. The Dijoud Plan committed France to US\$1500 million in development funds over the next decade; more importantly, it began the process of land reform. However, since the legislature was dominated by white settler interests opposed to these reforms for the Kanak people, Dijoud found that the only way he could proceed was by suspending the legislature and operating under Executive Order.

Dijoud insisted that only those parties receiving at least 10 per cent of the vote should be represented in the New Assembly. This precipitated the formation of three coalitions: the *Rassemblement pour la Caledonie dans la République* (RPCR), which, as its name suggests, was anti-independence; the *Fédération pour une Nouvelle Société Caledonienne* (FNSC); and the *Front Independantiste* (FI). The first two coalitions entered an alliance, with twenty-two seats in the new Assembly. The FI had only fourteen seats, but it had attracted 82 per cent of the Kanak vote. President Giscard visited New Caledonia in September 1979 and told the FI that it would have to win independence at the ballot box. He advised the white settlers to give the Kanaks a more equitable place in New Caledonian society by beginning with land reform.

In May 1981 François Mitterrand won the presidential election. Despite the absence of a Socialist Party in New Caledonia, he was soundly supported by the Kanak vote, just as the white settlers voted against him overwhelmingly. The new President sent his Minister for Overseas Territories, Henri Emmanuelli, to New Caledonia in August and he recommended acceleration of land reforms and other changes. But, like Dijoud before him, he found that he had to institute rule by decree to get anywhere in this process. In the charged atmosphere of late 1981 a European supporter of independence, Pierre Declerq, was assassinated. He was the first European to be buried in Kanak traditional burial grounds.

In March 1983 the *Front Independantiste* won control of eighteen of the thirty-two communes outside Noumea, while the RPCR took all forty-five of the commune seats in the capital. Noumea, the most industrialised city in the South Pacific, the *entrepôt* of the second most

important nickel deposits outside the communist world, was now clearly declaring itself an enclave of white workers, civil servants and tourists. In June 1983 the centrist FNSC withdrew from its coalition with the RPCR and entered into a new alliance with the *Front Indépendantiste*.

A year later President Mitterrand summoned two dozen New Caledonian leaders of all parties to Nainville-les-Roches for round-table discussions. There the French government recognised the right of the Kanak peoples to self-determination, including their right to sovereignty. The Minister for Overseas Territories, George Lemoine, proposed a Statute of Autonomy as a five-year transitional device to an act of self-determination in 1989. The Lemoine Statute was submitted to the French Senate in May 1984. The depth of indifference of the French Parliament to the fate of New Caledonia was indicated by the fact that only seventeen of 488 deputies were present at the vote. The Lemoine Statute passed into French law by seven votes in favour, six against and three abstentions.

The Lemoine Statute was as hotly contested in New Caledonia as it was ignored in metropolitan France. The white settlers said that it gave away too much; the Kanaks feared it was just a trick for postponing the problem to a post-Mitterrand government in 1988. The Statute attempted to promote the internal self-government that most dependent territories have today, but retained control for France of defence, the judicial system, foreign relations and—significantly—immigration. The *Front Indépendantiste* transformed itself into the Kanaka National Socialist Liberation Front (FLNKS) and announced that it would boycott the Territorial Assembly elections scheduled for 18 November 1984 that would serve as a referendum on the Statute. The FLNKS announced that it would form a Provisional Government on 1 December.

The Kanak boycott of the November elections was dramatically successful, even though President Mitterrand had responded by sending in 280 riot police. At the same time as the FLNKS formed its Provisional Government, President Mitterrand sent his Special Envoy, Edgard Pisani, to meet all the parties in order to submit a proposal for resolution of the impasse within two months.

Himself a former Minister for Overseas Territories during the early 1950s, President Mitterrand now accepted the failure of the Lemoine proposals and asked Pisani (former Gaullist Minister of Agriculture, member of the European Parliament and of the Brandt North-South Commission who had become a member of the Socialist Party in 1974)

to carry out the 'mission impossible' that would require the wisdom of Solomon. The Special Envoy worked remarkably quickly and on 7 January he announced his proposals to the people of New Caledonia over Noumean television:

France or independence.

Independence or France.

It is possible to combine that which has thus far been in opposition. I suggest that you decide, in the framework of Article 88 of the French Constitution, in favour of independence with association, guaranteeing the two countries stability in their relations and guaranteeing all, physical and moral persons, respect for their legitimate rights and security.

France and independence.

Mr Pisani insisted that there could be no lasting, peaceful or useful French presence in the Pacific without everyone's consent. But he also remarked that 'the last forty years in the life of this world teach us that once the claim for sovereignty is expressed by a genuine people, independence is inevitable.'

Mr Pisani proposed a referendum in July 1985 on the constitution of New Caledonia as an independent state associated with France. All citizens who had lived in the territory for three years would be permitted to vote on its future. If the proposal succeeded, the French Parliament would recognise New Caledonia's independence as of 1 January 1986. In the interim, the territory would be governed by a transitional government under the High Commissioner until a legislative assembly was elected that could negotiate the necessary treaty with France and the 'community pact designed to serve as the basis and ground rules of the multiracial society that Caledonian society will remain.' Residents would be offered New Caledonian or French citizenship, but no-one would be forced to leave the territory if he or she did not opt for New Caledonian citizenship. Noumea would be given 'special status'. New Caledonia would have sufficient international personality to become a member of the UN and of such regional associations as the South Pacific Forum. Pisani proposed generous economic support for the territory, and argued energetically for diversification of the economy since 'it is ridiculous that agriculture should account for only 3 per cent of New Caledonia's national product'. He sought, he said, not to strike a blow at the economy of Noumea, but rather to give it 'a solid base, a hinterland that can become its supplier and its client'.

The Pisani Plan was criticised in Paris and Noumea as a sellout, while the Kanaks argued that the enfranchisement of all who had been in the



territory for only three years would ensure the supremacy of white settler interests. Mr Pisani worked hard to explain his compromise to all the interested parties. 'I had to work out a "mix" of guarantees: guarantees to France, to the Kanak people, and to the other communities. Then I realised that the problem was not that of the French presence in New Caledonia but the terms of that presence . . . We have all the elements to arrive at a durable contract that will promote equilibrium.' Mr Pisani is convinced that 'It is the future of New Caledonia to remain a multi-racial society.'

While Parisian forces called for the impeachment of President Mitterrand, the Gaullist leader of Noumea, Jacques Lafleur, flatly rejected the Pisani Plan. The debate within the FLNKS over how far to accommodate Mr Pisani was polarised by the killing of the Minister of Internal Security, Eloi Machoro, on 12 January. Machoro's faction had travelled to Libya and was the most militant of the barricade builders in the countryside outside Noumea. Mr Mitterrand was in the process of extracting his troops from Chad, and now found himself having to send 3,000 of them out to New Caledonia to protect the white settlers against Machoro's Libyan-trained platoon. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the President of the Provisional Government, initially accused Pisani of acquiescing in the killing of Machoro in order to eliminate this militant faction. But President Mitterrand flew to New Caledonia for twelve hours of meetings with both sides on 18 January to 'reopen the dialogue'. His visit also constituted an endorsement of the Pisani Plan. Pisani told Stephen Downes of *The Age* (Melbourne) on 23 January:

'President Mitterrand has emphasised my general architecture and he has asked everybody to contribute to the shaping round this architecture of the flesh . . . I think the bones are fixed',

But President Mitterrand and Mr Pisani found that many observers consider that it is not only their metaphors that are mixed. '*L'indépendance avec La France*' seems a contradiction in terms to people more familiar with British principles of decolonisation. The editorial writers of *The Times* (London) passed the following judgement on January 8:

An ingenious proposal, but one which apparently defies a primary rule of logic: the law of the excluded middle. A state, one would think, is either independent or not. The presence of foreign forces is not the litmus test, but their use when it comes to internal security surely is. Are they to take orders from the independent government? If so, how can France guarantee the position of the settlers after independence? If not, how can the state be called sovereign?

*The Times* thought the proposals for a subsidiary special status within a special status for Noumea 'bizarre'. All in all, the proposals reminded the British too much of Cyprus or the communalism of Ulster.

Shortly after Mr Pisani returned to Paris at the beginning of April the journal *Valeurs Actuelles* leaked a French Defence Department study calling for a large naval base at Noumea to accommodate nuclear submarines, the enlargement of the airfield at Tontouta and the stationing of several thousand military personnel in what observers saw as 'a giant aircraft carrier of 19,000 square kilometres' situated on the junction of the major sea lanes in the South Pacific. Four thousand *Caldoches*, calling themselves 'Friends of the US', staged a rally in Noumea calling for US intervention to make New Caledonia its fifty-first state. At the end of April, Prime Minister Fabius presented a revised plan for New Caledonia which proposed a referendum on self-determination by the end of 1987 and in the meantime the creation of four Regional Councils to be elected in August 1985 which in turn would elect a Congress to replace the Territorial Assembly which would serve on an interim basis until the 1987 referendum. The plan also made gestures towards economic, social and cultural advancement for the Kanaks, but at the same time envisaged the reinforcement of the French military presence.

There was a riot at Noumea when French nuclear submarines visited at the beginning of May 1985, and feelings were not soothed either in New Caledonia or the region when the Defence Minister, Charles Hernu, visited and said emphatically 'The retreat of French soldiers from New Caledonia is non-negotiable. France is there for another 20, 30 or 100 years.' Meanwhile the revised proposals ran into trouble in Paris where the French National Assembly modified the powers of the Regional Council and created Councils of Chiefs in the regions. The FLNKS held its congress at the end of April to decide whether or not to boycott the August elections. The moderates prevailed and it was decided to use the 'regionalisation' proposals as a means towards independence.

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of French underground tests in the Pacific, France exploded its seventieth nuclear device at Mururoa despite continuing objections led by New Zealand. The French Senate sent a delegation to New Caledonia in July and later in the month the Senate referred the New Caledonia legislation to the Constitutional Council on the grounds that the electoral rearrangements in favour of the constituencies outside Noumea created imbalances. Pisani was

replaced by Fernand Wibaux, former French ambassador to Lebanon, as the *Rainbow Warrior* was blown up in Auckland harbour.

Soon after the South Pacific Forum met in Raratonga and failed to strongly endorse the campaign to have New Caledonia reinscribed on the UN's list of colonial territories, the French Constitutional Council declared the New Caledonia Bill unconstitutional because it would disadvantage the white settlers. Anthropologist Jean Guiart claimed that the *Caldoches* electoral roll was inflated while young Kanaks in particular had not been registered on their rolls. The French Right had every interest in prolonging the situation to prevent a resolution before the March 1986 National Assembly elections, but Mitterrand called an emergency session of the National Assembly in late August and the Bill was passed. The referendum was set for 28 September. The French role in the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* was becoming more apparent every week, but while Defence Minister Hernu eventually had to resign, the government survived and very few observers clearly understood the connection between the Greenpeace campaign and the decolonisation struggles in the French and American nuclear testing sites in the Pacific.

Voter turnout on 28 September was estimated as between 80 and 90 per cent. The settler party RPCR won twenty-five of the forty-six seats but only one of the four regional councils, Noumea. The FLNKS won not only the two regions they were expected to take, but also, the third, the central region or satellite region around Noumea. The Kanaks thus won control of the local level councils, but the RPCR settler interests hold a majority in the interim Congress.

Some observers saw the French strategy as one to 'gradually increase autonomy before a referendum on independence is held by the end of 1987' (*Sydney Morning Herald*). Others thought the FLNKS has locked themselves into agreeing to the enfranchisement of recent arrivals on the island that would trap them if the act of self-determination is ever held. Most saw it as a delaying tactic on the part of the French and wondered if the Kanaks had agreed to it because the loss of their military wing with the death of Machoro had taken away their will to fight other than at the ballot box. Few saw it as an enduring solution. The RPCR's Lafleur called it a 'completely mad' gerrymander. Prime Minister Lange, champion of Pacific denuclearisation but not necessarily decolonisation, said hopes for a middle ground were dashed by the election results. What nobody could deny was that the FLNKS held at least eighty per cent of the support of the Kanak people of New

Caledonia. The question for them to decide before the end of 1987 is how far they want to go with that mandate.

Whoever wins the March 1986 elections in France will not be able to just wish the New Caledonia problem away. As a moderate opposition leader told Ingrid A Kircher in April 1985: 'The [French] opposition is making politics using the New Caledonia issue as a trampoline. But if they have the New Caledonia problem on their hands when they come to power, it will not be easy for them.'