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Kanaky

An insurrectional climate?

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For weeks a major conflict has been going on, which the press is not talking about, or perhaps it is too far away, over there... in Kanaky. [1]

Blocked mining sites, roadblocks and counter-blocks, clashes in the centre of Noumea, fires, general strike... An insurrectional climate!

Juicy market

The object of this battle is the sale of the nickel factory in the south of the territory, owned by the Brazilian multinational Valé, to a consortium, Prony Resources, partly controlled by the Swiss trader Trafigura - infamous for dumping toxic waste in Côte d'Ivoire, poisoning tens of thousands of people.

The industrial complex consists of an open-cast mine, a hydro-metallurgical ore processing plant, and a port in Prony Bay. This high-risk industrial site also houses one of the largest acid storage facilities in the world,

The plant produces nickel and cobalt, necessary for the manufacture of batteries for electric cars, a juicy market that attracts predators.

The site concerns 3500 jobs, 1350 of which are direct, i.e. 5% of the working population.

The united independentists categorically reject this sale. Their wish: to keep majority control over the country's resources, and no longer let the multinationals decide for them.

They have a project: a takeover proposal by the Sofinor Company - the financing company of the North Province (managed by the independentists), backed by the industrialist Korea Zinc and with a 56% New Caledonian public shareholding. A proposal that was purely and simply rejected. On Wednesday 9 December, the sale of the Valé factory was carried out.

"No to the selling off of our heritage"

The factory will therefore be taken over by Prony Resources, a consortium made up of 50% "Caledonian interests"(?) and 25% of the Swiss trader Trafigura. The remainder will be held by investment funds, at least one of which is Australian.

The government has nothing to do with this transaction, which concerns private interests, but everyone knows that New Caledonian nickel mining has always benefited from financial support in the form of tax exemption measures, advances, loans, and that it is in fact an unavoidable partner.

Faced with this contempt, with decisions taken without them, concerning their future, the future of their children, jobs,

the environment, the independentists see red: the USTKE (independentist trade union, majority in *Usine du Sud*) launched an all-out general strike, while denouncing the essential role of the French state in the transaction, and wondering about the reasons which led to this initiative.

FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front), the indigenous customary negotiating body (ICAN), and the *Usine du Sud = usine du pays* collective called for a general mobilisation.

Roadblocks on the roads, blockades of factories and mining sites, demonstrations multiplied for several days, and slogans flourished: "Trafigura out", "Recuperate our resources", "No to the selling off of our land heritage". Clashes between independence activists and law enforcement agencies broke out all the way to the centre of Noumea.

Shots fired with live ammunition

Hard right militants, white-hot and armed with shotguns, have in turn erected counter-dams and boast of clearing the independence fighters.

Incursions in the factory, fires in administrative buildings and vehicles, and it's the army that intervenes, the gendarmes fire live ammunition to stop the vehicles that were attempting the intrusion. The factory was evacuated and shut down.

49 people were arrested, five were sentenced to prison terms.

Faced with this explosive situation there were numerous calls for calm on all sides and for a braking of the mobilization.

The USTKE (Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers) lifted the general strike and called for continuing the mobilization in support of the collective *Usine du Sud = usine du pays*. A support which means above all dialogue on jobs and the preservation of the environment.

The FLNKS seems to accept the outstretched hand of the Minister of Overseas Territories, while specifying "that it is only a question of reorganization, because the movement will be a long-term one".

This conflict will undoubtedly leave indelible traces in an even more fragmented society, and crystallizes concerns less than two years before the next referendum.

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[1] Kanaky (or [New Caledonia](#)) is a French overseas territory. The most recent referendum in October 2020 voted 46.74 % for independence, 53.26 % against. See (in French) ["Kanak : l'accès à la pleine souveraineté est inéluctable"](#).