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Kanaky (New Caledonia)

Kanaky – put a stop (really) to the time of colonies!

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Today it is necessary to lay the foundations of a citizenship of New Caledonia allowing the original people to constitute with the men and women who live there a human community affirming its common destiny. [...] Ten years later, it is time to open a new stage marked by the full recognition of the Kanak identity, a prerequisite for the reestablishment of a social contract between all the communities living in New Caledonia, and by a sharing of sovereignty with France on the path to full sovereignty.

Preamble to the Nouméa Accords signed in 1998 by the FLNKS, the colonial right and the French state.

At a moment when a constitutional law is reaffirming the colonial project in Kanaky, it is more than urgent to oppose the manoeuvres of the French state against the Kanak people and to promote solidarity. Let us look back at a fight for self-determination and emancipation... which is continuing.

When France took possession of Kanaky in 1853, the archipelago was inhabited by a people of tens of thousands, a people who had been living on these lands for 3,000 years, with their culture, their economy, their social organization. The repression and the massacres of Kanaks opposing land dispossession, as well as diseases, endangered the survival of the Kanak people. Confined in reserves, the Kanak used these spaces to rebuild their social organization, their economy, their cultural (and political) life.

The anti-colonial struggles, the national liberation movements in Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba, found an echo in the population. Priests and seminarians (Tjibaou, Machoro, etc.) left the church, students in France participated in May '68 and established relationships with anti-colonialist activists from all continents.

The settler-colonial policy of the French state

Worried about this politicization and the first actions and demands for independence, the French state decided in 1972 to engage in a policy of increasing the population by encouraging the settlement of French people. The Kanaks were at that time the majority of the population.

In 1981, when Mitterrand and the left came to power, the Kanak people only represented 40 per cent of the population. But that was the time of hope. The innate and active right of the Kanak people to independence was enshrined in the governmental Common Programme. A minority sector of European settlers agreed to form a local government chaired by Jean-Marie Tjibaou.

The majority of the colonial right became radicalized, and denounced being abandoned by the state. Its members identified with the pieds-noirs of Algeria (victims of the abandonment of Algeria by De Gaulle), and supported the Afrikaners of South Africa. Weapons were circulating, barbouzes (including many ex-OAS) were recruited, militias were formed. In 1983, the Territorial Assembly was stormed and separatist elected officials were beaten up. The state did not react: it prepared a new statute. In 1984, it presented its draft statute, with new institutions, land reform and greater autonomy.

The problem was that the French Constitution only recognizes one people within the territory of France: the French people, composed of free men and women who are equal in law. Thus any metropolitan resident passing through or having just arrived has the same rights as a Kanak to decide on the future of the archipelago. In the National Assembly, the left-wing deputies, in the majority, rejected the amendments tabled by the only Kanak deputy... The settlement policy could continue.

From the creation of the FLNKS to the Nouméa Accords

Condemned to become a small minority in their own country, the Kanak people were becoming radicalized. In September 1984, the FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front) was created, and a provisional government was formed. On November 18, the day of elections to the new institutions, there was the start of the insurrection, Éloi Machoro broke his village's ballot box with an axe. The photo went around the world. In France, thousands of activists were organizing solidarity.

From 1984 to 1988, there was a revolutionary situation in the archipelago, which lastingly transformed the country. The Kanak people did not have the means to get rid of French colonialism militarily, but they had the capacity to paralyse the country and create a permanent state of insecurity. The state responded to the actions of the FLNKS with repression and gave the militias free rein. Dozens of activists were killed, hundreds imprisoned, in particular in what became known as the Ouvéa cave affair. France was singled out at the UN; the General Assembly reinstated New Caledonia on the list of territories to be decolonized. From now on Kanaky was under the gaze of the UN, and France had to answer for its actions. The FLNKS was recognized as the legitimate representative of the Kanak people.

In 1988, then in 1998, taking advantage of the balance of forces created on the ground, the FLNKS negotiated agreements with the colonial right and the French state aimed at liberating geographical, political, economic, cultural and diplomatic spaces, and occupying them, in order to develop policies preparing the country for independence.

The Nouméa Accords of 1998 established, in Kanaky, in France and before the international community, the readiness of the French state to initiate a policy of decolonization, the outcome of which would be the accession of the country to full sovereignty. But above all it was constitutionally recognized. The Kanak people were recognized as the central pillar of the country, which was also open to the inhabitants who had been resident in the country for at least ten years at the time of signing the agreement. Together, they aimed to become citizens of the sovereign country.

Three referendums (in 2018, 2020, and 2022) were organized to consult citizens on the country's accession to full sovereignty. In 2018, 47.3 per cent voted for independence, in 2020, 47 per cent. In 2022, the state imposed the holding of the third referendum in the midst of the Covid crisis. The heavily affected Kanak people buried their hundreds of dead and more than 90 per cent boycotted the referendum. The result, with a turnout of 43 per cent, was a 96 per cent vote to remain a French colony.

Since 1998, the FLNKS has been in the minority in the central institutions of the colony (congress, government). It is the majority in two out of three provinces. Equipped with considerable powers (economy, culture), the provinces have allowed the FLNKS to gain a foothold in strategic economic sectors, such as nickel, tourism, and transport. But the bulk of the country's economy remains in the hands of a few multimillionaire families associated with multinationals. The parties of the colonial right represent their interests. They use the political power they hold in government to implement a mixture of ultraliberal policies thanks to financial transfers from the motherland and the

euros obtained from tax evasion thanks to tax exemption laws.

Economic growth of the years 2000-2010

Driven by high nickel prices and the French state's chequebook, the country experienced a high rate of economic growth until 2015. We saw the construction of two metallurgical factories, an airport, a hospital, and numerous infrastructures: roads, electrical networks, a new town, etc. The crisis in France turned off the tap that supplied the euros, and nickel prices collapsed. This led to an abysmal debt, three factories in near bankruptcy, social systems in bankruptcy.

During the elections in 2020, the FLNKS won seats but remained in the minority in the congress. A new political force emerged; the Oceanian Awakening, representing the Wallisian and Futunian community. Wallis and Futuna is a French colony located in Polynesia. As part of its settlement policy, the French state organized the migration of thousands of people to work in construction, mining, public works, etc. For a long time this community was used by the right as a strong-arm force against the Kanaks. The Oceanian Awakening is the expression of the emancipation of the community from the colonial right.

In 2021, the FLNKS and the Oceanian Awakening formed a so-called Oceanian majority in the congress. This alliance made up the majority of the new government chaired by Louis Mapou, activist and historic leader of the FLNKS. For the first time since the Tjibaou government in 1983, the Kanaks were in power.

Since the formation of this new majority, the colonial right has continued to radicalize: the big families are withdrawing their capital, the nickel multinationals are disinvesting in Kanaky to the benefit of Indonesia. To deal with the Covid crisis, the state subsidized all local authorities but imposed a loan on the government of New Caledonia at a rate higher than that of the market.

The population is suffering the consequences of the crisis: unemployment, high cost of living, failing public services, etc.

Emperor Macron

In July 2023, Macron came to Kanaky, escorted by two Rafales. The two planes, after having performed their circus over the country, flew to Australia to participate in military manoeuvres alongside NATO forces in the Pacific. The enemy was China. In Kanaky, Macron invited the Caledonians to join as an ally of France in the construction of an Indo-Pacific axis (from Mayotte to Papeete, including India, New Zealand, and Australia) aimed at opposing Chinese influence in the region. In this construction, the FLNKS does not appear as a reliable ally. In the Pacific, at the UN, it is a thorn in the side of French diplomacy. If there was no money for the Covid crisis in Kanaky, there is money to try to distract the countries of the region from their support for the FLNKS: creation of a military academy, cooperation agreements, etc.

Besieged by the colonial right, faced with a French government determined in its imperial aims, the Oceanian alliance resisted, and since then the country's government has tried to take measures to deal with the crisis. The timid tax reforms which affect the interests of the wealthiest and the employers were the subject of fierce resistance from the colonial right and the employers.

In March 2024, the bosses of the road transport sector, supported by all employers and the right blocked fuel depots,

threatening the country with paralysis. The state, responsible for maintaining order, allowed this to happen. Right-wing elected officials left Congress and government, declaring the institutions they had led for decades illegitimate and undemocratic.

To reduce tension, Louis Mapou announced the withdrawal of a tax on fuels, aimed at making up for the chronic deficit in electricity production and distribution, at the origin of the blockade. Despite this withdrawal, the blockade continued, and the right called for a march on the congress. It took the mobilization of hundreds of FLNKS activists determined to have the blockades lifted for the road transport bosses to send their trucks back to the garage.

After having imposed the holding of a referendum in the midst of the Covid crisis, endorsing the result despite the boycott of the Kanak people, the government wants to guarantee the colonization of Kanaky by modifying the electorate, by opening it to anyone living for at least ten years in the country, making the Kanaks definitively a minority.

Fighting the new constitutional law

The constitutional law, initiated by the government and supported by the local right, is a break with the agreements made in 1998. It is contrary to the numerous UN resolutions which oppose colonial settlement policies. Like in 1983, the only Kanak senator elected to the Senate is leading the fight to oppose this law. His amendments have been rejected.

On 23 and 24 March 2024, the FLNKS held its congress, open for the occasion to the entire independence movement. Unanimously, the 700 activists and delegates (which in France would correspond to a congress of 140,000 people) present called for mobilization against the constitutional bill, in support of the Louis Mapou government, and the opening of discussions with the state aimed at the accession of Kanaky to full sovereignty.

The putschist policy of the colonial right, the passivity or even complicity of the French state in the face of its actions and threats, demonstrate that there is no place for a territory governed by the Kanaks within the French Republic.

On Thursday 28 March, the colonial right called for a march on the congress. The FLNKS called for a march against the constitutional law.

Anti-colonialist, and anti-racist activists, in solidarity with the struggle of peoples for their liberation, in Palestine, Ukraine and Kurdistan. must be ready to mobilize in solidarity with the Kanak people.

2 May 2024

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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