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Kanaky (New Caledonia)

Kanak independentists present common candidates for legislative elections

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The French elections also concerned the French overseas départements and collectivities such as Kanaky (New Caledonia) in the south-west Pacific Ocean. The results of the vote on 12 June showed that the independentist forces grouped under the FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front) banner had achieved their first goal - to be present in the second round, despite the very low turn out of barely one-third of registered voters. The archipelago is divided into two constituencies, in both cases the run off is between the candidate of Macron's grouping (Union loyaliste-Ensemble) and the FLNKS candidate.

At a press conference on Tuesday 17 May at Karigou in the town of Dumbéa, the Kanak independence movement announced the names of its candidates for the June 2022 legislative elections. Grouped around Wasissi Konyi, representative of the Palika in the political bureau of the FLNKS, the independentist candidates presented themselves, along with their alternates. Why were they standing? What were their goals?

"The independence movement must be represented in the National Assembly, it must be in the negotiations with the French government when they start. The independentists will ask for bilateral discussions," announced the spokesperson for the Front. Following the last two congresses, that of the FLNKS and the popular congress, on 7 and 8 May at the N'Dé tribe, the independentist, progressive and nationalist forces made this commitment, and they reaffirmed that "the Nouméa Accord is a process of decolonization, the country is on the road to emancipation". "The goal is to get into the second round, it is completely achievable," indicated the FLNKS spokesperson, before the candidates took the floor to introduce themselves and explain their participation in these national elections.

"In the National Assembly, our independence movement is not represented"

In the first constituency (Nouméa, îles-des-Pins, Loyalty Islands): Wali Wahetra, representative of Palika in the Province of the Islands at the congress, originally from Drehu, has been a teacher for thirty years. In the Congress, she is the Vice-Chair of the Education and Culture Committee. "It's a huge responsibility. The independence movement has chosen us to be ambassadors". During her speech, she recalled the five positions on which the Front and its allies agreed: "Challenging the political legitimacy of the last referendum consultation; the accession of New Caledonia to its full and entire sovereignty by the transfer of the last remaining powers; the non-negotiable maintenance of the achievements of the Nouméa Accord, which is guaranteed by the principle of irreversibility; maintaining New Caledonia on the list of countries to be decolonized; a categorical refusal to choose a new status within the French Republic. The bilateral format was recorded at the N'Dé congresses," she said. "The first constituency is represented by Nouméa, île-des-Pins and the Loyalty Islands. The delimitation of boundaries (decided by the then Minister of the Interior Charles Pasqua in 1986) is totally iniquitous and unjust. We want to call on the solidarity of the New Caledonian people, if they have the values of democracy at heart. In the National Assembly, our independence movement is not represented. We would like to go there to have our own say. The last Kanak deputy who went to the Assembly was Rock Pidjot in 1986 and since then the independentists have never been able to be elected because of these boundaries. This is partisan and completely unfair. It is a colonial attitude of the French state..."

"We must tell the ordinary Caledonian that they must no longer be afraid"

Her alternate is Jean-Fidéli Malalua, fourth Vice President of the USTKE (Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers). He has been active in the trade-union movement for fifteen years. He says he is “battle-hardened from politics and especially from social questions” . He is of Futunian origin, he was born in La Foa in 1973. “I have taken up a cause that corresponds to my convictions, it is the struggle of the Kanak people. I'm not hiding from you that it's not easy” . Questions might arise. “Why go to the National Assembly if you are asking for independence? Why participate in these elections? It is precisely the opportunity to go there to give a certain tone to the vision of the country and to give our point of view to the elected members of the National Assembly, but especially to Caledonians of all ethnic groups. As a non-Kanak and especially one of our generation. This country is viable together. We have to tell the average Caledonian that they don't have to be afraid anymore. We need respect from the Caledonian voters ... In the word independence, there are clichés that scare people... In Kanak and Oceanian culture, the search for consensus means that we have to discuss anyway...,” he explained, saying that the politics of fear would lead nowhere. “The mosaic of communities gathered around an independence project is not exclusive. It is a common project and of general interest,” he concluded.

“We are proud to be in this fight”

In the second constituency (the municipalities of Grand-Nouméa and the rest of the territory), the candidate is Gérard Reignier, former head of the Union Calédonienne and the FLNKS. “What we want is to have a representation in the National Assembly to make heard the voice of independentists and nationalists, of those who want this country to become a nation with all its populations in a common destiny”. “The load is heavy but the combat is beautiful,” he said. “We are proud to be in this fight. We hope to win and bring back some truth to the National Assembly... We have the duty to inform the French political class, but also French public opinion, which is in favour of the full sovereignty of our country. The words liberty, equality, fraternity should not be besmirched. Perhaps France will be less beautiful without New Caledonia, but certainly if the French state, along with the independentists, allows this country to access its full sovereignty, France will be greater,” he added.

His alternate, Marie-Pierre Goyetche, was president of the USTKE from April 2012 to December 2015. Currently, she is vice-president of the honorary college of the Trade Union Organization and vice-president of the Labour Party. A teacher by training, she got involved very early in the trade union struggle. This trade union commitment will enable her to make the link with the field of politics. She was elected to a municipal council, to the southern province and to the congress. “I am mixed-race, I am proud of my New Caledonian family who arrived through prison. [1] And I am proud of my Kanak culture in which I was brought up” . She wanted to send this message to the government: “It is out of the question to touch the composition of the electorate, that is the reason for our commitment to these legislative elections.”

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[1] New Caledonia was a French penal colony from 1864 to 1987. Prisoners sent included those convicted for participation in the Paris Commune , notably Louise Michel.