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New Caledonia

Kanaky: who's causing trouble?

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Less than two months before the third referendum that the French government has decided to organize in Kanaky on 12 December 2021, the atmosphere is tense, with the entirety of the independence movement demanding its postponement to 2022 while so-called “loyalist” forces demand its maintenance against the background of a government position for now unchanged as to the deadline. But what lies behind this situation?

After eighteen months of a “covid-free” situation throughout the Territory at the cost of extremely strict measures accepted by all (isolation of Grande Terre and the islands, restriction of inter-island movement and entries, mandatory fourteen day quarantine and so on), the Delta variant of the pandemic has recently and surreptitiously arrived, triggering a terrible wave of infection. To date, more than 260 deaths in a few weeks (which would be equivalent to several tens of thousands of deaths in France!) with more than 50% concerning the Kanak community and more than 25% the Oceanian community, against a background of fairly widespread comorbidities (obesity, diabetes, precarious living conditions).

Pandemic wave, health measures and mourning customs

Faced with this disaster which affects the different peoples of the Territory very unevenly, the current government led by Louis Mapou, an important figure in the UNI-Palika tendency of the FLNKS (“Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste”, a pro-independence alliance of political parties) has taken measures that are both reasoned and very firm (protective measures, mask wearing, health passes, targeted containment measures, obligatory vaccination in the near future and so on) showing a full sense of responsibility on the part of the separatist leaders, and obtaining almost unanimous agreement from all political currents, including the opposition, in the Congress of New Caledonia. In addition, the Melanesian and Polynesian communities in mourning are also demonstrating perfect obedience to the restrictions on burials, in particular by accepting temporary burials near Noumea without being able to accompany their relatives to their mound and/or island of origin, and being temporarily unable to respect their long and complicated customary mourning rituals requiring the displacement of entire tribes, impossible in these times of restriction of movement and protective measures. As a result, it is almost impossible to have the time and energy to organize a referendum election campaign; hence the unanimity of the pro-independence camp (all tendencies of the FLNKS, as well as all the other components - MNSK, PT, USTKE, Dynamic Sud) demanding a postponement of the referendum to 2022, the deadline provided by the Nouméa Accords being before October 2022.

At the same time, the forces supporting maintenance of the Territory in the French Republic, gathered in “Les Voix du Non,” are almost unanimously (except Calédonie Ensemble which has agreed to consider a possible postponement in the event of an uncontrolled pandemic) in favour of sticking to the date initially planned. They realise that, for them, the referendum campaign will simply focus on all the exceptional health measures that the French government is implementing locally to deal with the pandemic and its consequences (massive health resources coming from metropolitan France, transfer of patients, aid to companies and staff) showing the benefits of remaining “in France” for the future. And some of their leaders add the need to finally “purge” the Nouméa Accords which have lasted too long, like Senator Pierre Frogier, who supports a proposal to give increased autonomy to the three current Provinces in the event of a victory of the anti-independence vote, a dangerous partition project that would result with a Southern Province with 75% of the population of the Territory (and the largest Kanak population too!) as well as 75% of the local economy! And Pierre Brétegnier, one of the signatories of the Matignon Accords of 1988 under the RPCR, one of the main thinkers of the colonial right, said, when it had just lost the majority in Congress in April 2021: “On the road to Kanak independence? It is natural to discuss with the independence leaders, but they are gaining ground

every time. Systematically, each of their demands concerning the institutional future of the country or the nickel mining policy begins under the violent pressure of the FLNKS and, in the end, when they have not obtained everything - which the loyalist negotiators announce as a victory - they have, every time, advanced New Caledonia one step towards Kanak and socialist independence... Hence Caledonia emerges each time a little less French. One day we will have to give ourselves the means to stop this process, if not to reverse it." This sums up the current revanchist state of mind of the "loyalists"!

And does the French government, guarantor of past agreements, stick to neutrality? While claiming to be neutral in the strict application of the Nouméa Accords of 1998, following the Matignon Accords of 1988, the French government in fact clearly asserts itself in favour of remaining in France: "France would be less beautiful without New Caledonia!", said Macron; while prime minister Castex recently said in the National Assembly: "We reaffirmed our strong wish that the choice of Caledonians be that of France." That makes this referendum campaign totally unfair and distorted, especially since he recently produced the totally unbalanced document on the "Consequences of Yes and No", Moreover in the great Indo-Pacific Axis project dear to Macron since 2017, recently ridiculed by the Australian choice of US nuclear submarines, New Caledonia is a centrepiece; which can also be understood - without accepting it - against the backdrop of China's progress in many of the newly independent states of the Pacific.

Paul Néaoutyne, signatory of the Nouméa Accords, former right-hand man of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and current president of the Northern Province, is right to invoke respect for the word given because, during the last Committee of Signatories with Edouard Philippe in 2019, the latter had also proposed a referendum in September 2022, after the national presidential and legislative deadlines to avoid any collusion. Let us remember the attack on the Ouvéa cave in 1988 as part of a Chirac-Mitterrand standoff between the two rounds of the presidential election! But the Castex government has changed the situation, preferring to ask its Overseas Minister, Sébastien Lecornu, to organize "Léprédour meetings" (named after a Caledonian islet opposite Boulouparis, property of the High Commission), in a vacuum with selected guests rather than remain faithful to the Committees of the regular signatories in Matignon. While it is the government's prerogative to set the date of the referendum, the pro-independence camp has made known its preference for 2022 for months and well before the viral wave. And today, twenty-five separatist municipalities have already refused to organize the vote of 12 December.

In addition, internationalizing the problem, Papua New Guinea's ambassador to the UN has on behalf of the Spearhead Group bringing together the Melanesian States of the Pacific and the FLNKS as a full member, solemnly asked the French government for a postponement in the name of the current emergency health situation in the Territory.

Who are the troublemakers?

Yes, the old boycotts decided by the Kanaks recall painful moments, but each time, did they have any choice in the face of successive betrayals of promises given and authentically neo-colonial projects? The "loyalists" are trying to scaremonger with the evocation of these boycotts, while already predicting a disastrous future in case of results distorted by Kanak "non-participation" (the current unitary slogan), going so far as to ask for the application of the results of the second referendum because of the impossibility of holding the third through the fault of the Kanaks! But what were the situations that pushed the Kanaks to boycott; who was originally responsible for them?

So those who risk provoking future unrest are those, including the French government, who refuse to postpone the referendum to 2022, if only out of respect for the mourning customs of the Kanak people hit so hard by the pandemic (with the death of many cadres of the independence movement in the prime of their life, not forgetting all the anonymous of all ages).

Kanaky: who's causing trouble?

May humanity and reason take precedence over lowly political calculations; the common destiny of the country is at stake! Let us support the Kanak people, still today in a new and terrible ordeal, in their demand for a sovereign and independent Kanaky - New Caledonia with respect for all components of its population!

1 November 2021

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

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