

In sum, 1991 was a year of declared intentions, pyrrhic victories, and hardening positions on both sides of the political divide in Fiji, sowing seeds of issues and concerns that will come to life in 1992. To paraphrase the words of Herman Melville, 1991 was like a ship on its passage out, not a journey complete.

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### NEW CALEDONIA

1991

In the context of the continuing implementation of policies arising from the Matignon Accord, 1991 represents a year of transition between the creation of the new institutions—particularly the provincial system—and the political reassessment to be accomplished in 1992 by the independentists prior to the

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negotiation of development contracts for 1993-1997.

The concept of economic redistribution for the territory, which at first had mostly involved the adoption of the provincial system, gradually evolved toward new concepts as the gap that existed between the large infrastructure projects proposed by the provincial governments and the actual expectations and needs of local communities became apparent. Increasingly, decisions regarding development were being taken at the level of municipal governments. A discrepancy exists between the need of many municipalities in the back country and the islands for public facilities and their financial resources. Recognition of this discrepancy led to a proposal to the territorial congress to establish for 1992 an Inter-municipal Readjustment Fund (Fonds Intercommunal de Péréquation) to finance these public facilities. The municipality of Noumea would not be a part of this system, and would instead operate under a State-City contract.

Alain Christnacht, the new high commissioner and central government delegate for New Caledonia, assumed his post in January 1991. He had served as secretary general for the territory from 1980 to 1982, and had been head of Cabinet for the minister for Overseas Territories since July 1988.

In April, the RPCR (*Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République*, the loyalist party) held its first convention since that of July 1988, immediately after the signing of the Matignon Accord. Jacques Lafleur, reelected RPCR president, described how he



expected the situation to develop after 1998. Convinced that the independentists would fail to reach a solution through the 1998 referendum, he proposed a solution by consensus, to be defined according to the ratios between the various factions that emerge from the territorial elections of 1995.

This proposal was approved by the president of Union Calédonienne (UC), the majority component of the FLNKS (*Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste*, the umbrella organization grouping various independentist factions). UC President François Burck concluded that the concept of a Kanak and socialist independence had evolved, and that independence for New Caledonia should no longer be thought of as a breakaway from France, but as an interdependence. Burck considers that the makeup of the consensus mentioned earlier has yet to be defined, and that it should be the subject of debate before the elections of 1995. In an interview in the Paris daily *Libération*, Léopold Jorédié, president of the North Province chapter of the UC, raised the idea of creating associated federated states that would assume, progressively, a part of the responsibilities of the French central government in matters of immigration, mining, and foreign trade.

UC's grass-roots membership, for whom the 1998 referendum can still be summed up as a choice between France and independence, has yet to express its opinion on these proposals by its political leaders. The PALIKA party (*Parti de Libération Kanak*, one of the minority factions within the FLNKS, to which belongs Paul Néaoutyine, cur-

rent FLNKS president) has voiced strong opposition to these proposals, arguing that they would lead to a breakup of the territory. He has requested of North Province President Léopold Jorédié that he resign from office on account of the incompatibility between his statements and the policies of the FLNKS.

The dispute that for months put the mayor of Lifou (also first vice president of the Loyalty Islands Province) in opposition to the island's traditional chiefs is typical of the problems that are cropping up with increasing frequency as new development projects affect Melanesian landownership structures. Whereas land disputes used to occur mostly between Melanesians and Europeans, a recent increase in the number of such disputes and litigations between Melanesians is noticeable. This increase is most likely due to the new financial dimension given to land by development projects. The need to define for the future the respective roles of the traditional chiefs and the political leaders has been the subject of numerous debates within the various independentist factions during the year.

Generally, the social climate has been less tense than in 1990, despite a number of strikes, many of which were prolonged because of the rivalry between the two major labor unions, the *Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Kanak et Exploités* (Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers, USTKE) and the *Union Syndicale des Ouvriers et Employés de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Union of New Caledonian Workers and Employees, USOENC).

The slowdown in economic activity that was observed in 1990 continued through 1991, in spite of a recovery in the production and exportation of nickel ore during the first two quarters; the production of metal remained stable. At mid-year, the tight economic situation was still affecting industry and trade, both wholesale and retail.

For the first nine months of 1991, activity in the tourism sector was slightly lower than in the previous year. By the end of September, 60,255 visitors had been recorded, 2.7 percent fewer than for the same period in 1990. This was mainly due to a marked drop in Japanese visitors during the first quarter.

Although inflation registered a significant drop in 1990, it rose again in 1991. By October, the rise in retail prices had reached 4.3 percent, against an increase of 1.4 percent for the whole of 1990.

On the international scene, relations between the territory and the nations of the Pacific region intensified. Two ministers from Vanuatu (for Health and for Agriculture) paid an official visit in March. In July, the Fiji Foreign Trade minister and the Solomon Islands Foreign Affairs minister came to New Caledonia on a mission for the South Pacific Forum. In October, the governor of American Samoa came on an information mission, followed in November by the deputy prime minister of New Zealand, and in December by the prime minister of Papua New Guinea.

Another sign of the growing integration of the territory into the political environment of the region is the appointment of Jacques Iékawé to the

post of secretary general of the South Pacific Commission during the Thirty-first South Pacific Conference in Tonga in November. He is the first French-speaking Melanesian and the first Caledonian to hold this position. Iékawé, aged forty-five, was born on the island of Tiga in the Loyalty group, and had been secretary general for the territory from 1988, until he became territorial secretary (*préfet délégué*) in charge of economic development in March 1990.

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### PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Some negative trends of recent years continued in 1991. Although growth in the minerals sector approached boom proportions, the rest of the economy, on which the vast majority of the population depends, remained sluggish. A widening gap between expectations and opportunities continued to aggravate problems of social control and to place resource development efforts in jeopardy. Meanwhile, the secessionist crisis in Bougainville, where these problems are most starkly illustrated, remained unresolved after three years.

The government's attempt in 1991 to confront the formidable law-and-order problem was the most comprehensive to date. According to Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu, crime threatened the viability of major resource projects and "the very future of our young country" (TPNG, 21 March 1991). Some of his crime-fighting measures were designed to improve the state's ability to exercise social control. Curfews were imposed in Port Moresby and other cities to restrict the movement of "rascal"