

# **The Matignon Accords and Kanak Education in New Caledonia**

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**The "Globalisation and Learning" Conference on  
Educational Development**

**New College, Oxford  
21-25 September 1995**

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## **Abstract**

Signed in June 1988, the Matignon Accords have been credited with bringing peace and development to the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia. For the indigenous Kanak population, however, the Accords have led to demobilisation, division and disillusionment in an independence movement that had shown considerable unity and strength.

This paper examines the political origins and consequences of the Accords and discusses concerns about the development model upon which they are based. It outlines the educational promises of the Matignon Accords which were devised in response to growing Kanak dissatisfaction with and mobilisation against French education.

The paper shows that, in the face of fundamental critiques Kanak people have made of French education in New Caledonia, the orientation of the territory's educational authority, the Vice-Rectorat, remains unchanged. It also highlights attempts by the Vice-Rectorat to downplay and even conceal the failure of the school system to address the underachievement of Kanak pupils.

The paper presents a critique of a number of educational and training initiatives that have been introduced in line with the Matignon Accords including the introduction of Kanak languages into the curriculum, the production of locally oriented school text books, the *Programme d'Enrichissement Instrumental* and *Operation 400 Cadres*. It argues that these programmes are an integral part of an approach to development that is leading not towards Kanak independence but to the strengthening of French control and influence in New Caledonia.

## **1. Introduction**

The Matignon Accords, a tripartite agreement signed by the French Socialist Government and the leaders of the major pro- and anti-independence groupings in New Caledonia, were concluded on 26 June 1988. They have been credited with bringing the territory back from the brink of civil war and ushering in a new era of peace, prosperity and equality. However, they also have their critics. While the agreement focused on policy and process, there was disagreement over the desired outcome of the Accords. With contradictory aspirations and expectations, both pro- and anti-colonial signatories committed themselves to doing the work needed to realise their respective goals.

This article examines the impact of the Accords and the role of education in New Caledonia since they were signed. It begins with an assessment of the context within which the Matignon Accords were signed and the impact the agreement has had on colonial relations. On the basis of this, recent educational developments are assessed in three parts. The first examines citizenship through a discussion of recent curriculum changes. This is followed by a discussion of the problem of the educational underachievement of the indigenous Kanak population and an assessment of some new measures introduced by France in line with its stated commitment to enhancing equality of educational opportunity in the territory. The final section considers the issue of high level education and training which has been implemented as part of the development strategy laid down in the Matignon Accords.

## **2. The Political Origins and Consequences of the Matignon Accords**

Under the leadership of Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, and his Overseas Territories Minister, Bernard Pons, French colonial rule in the two years leading up to the Matignon Accords had been at its most aggressively anti-Kanak since the Second World War. Determined to confront the independence movement, the right-wing government embarked on a politico-military strategy that had been developed in Algeria called Nomadisation, which involved the deployment of mobile army units very close to Kanak tribes.

The Government also sought to end the debate over independence by imposing a referendum on independence in which anyone living in the territory could vote. In clear breach of United Nations guidelines on such plebiscites, the terms of the referendum took no account of the systematic immigration policies France had applied in the 1970s and it was boycotted by the pro-independence parties. Despite a 98 per cent vote against independence, therefore, the 13 September 1987 referendum did little to convince the international community, much less the Kanak people, of the legitimacy of continued French colonial rule.

The overt belligerence of the Chirac administration left the normally conservative South Pacific Forum, which had previously accepted any French Socialist government assurance over New Caledonia, with no grounds for not acceding to Kanak demands to take their case to the United Nations. On 4 December 1986, the UN General Assembly voted to refer the case of New Caledonia to its Decolonisation Committee. Within New Caledonia, France was forcing Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the usually measured and moderate president of the Front de Liberation Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), into adopting an increasingly hard line:

"The situation in Kanaky has reached the point where Kanaks have no option but to arm themselves with guns... To continue (unarmed) would be sending our people to the slaughter house" [Quoted by AAP, 14 December 1987].

The final act of Chirac/Pons rule in New Caledonia was what became known as "the Ouvéa massacre". On the eve of the final round of the French Presidential elections in which Chirac was a candidate, an elite French military unit was ordered to attack a cave on the island of Ouvéa where FLNKS activists had been holding a groups of gendarmes hostage for thirteen days. Despite the release of the hostages, the attack was widely condemned as a cynical election manoeuvre by Chirac and Mitterand and the Socialist Party were returned to power.

Many civilians were tortured during the occupation of Ouvéa, and the attack itself left nineteen activists dead, at least three of whom had been killed or left to die after surrendering. The entire Kanak population and especially that of Ouvéa (just 2,700 people) were traumatised by the events. It was against this background, just fifty-two days after the massacre, that the new government negotiated the signing of the Matignon Accords.

Thus, although they are an ostensibly free agreement, the Accords are steeped in coercion and were not signed by equal partners. The institutions of the French state as well as many of the leading personalities, including President Mitterand, remained unchanged from those which authorised the Ouvéa massacre. No matter how much it voiced condemnation of the massacre, the new government drew strength in the negotiations from the actions of its predecessor and "the implicit threat that such acts could happen again" [Ounei-Small, 1992: p.172]. As the wider FLNKS considered its position on the Accords, which had been signed unilaterally by some of the movement's leaders, the French Overseas Territories Minister, Louis Le Pensec, made this threat explicit with a warning that the agreement would not be renegotiated and that FLNKS failure to ratify it would result in the reimposition of the overtly anti-Kanak Pons Statute [Quoted by AFP, 22 July 1988].

The Accords postponed a decision on independence until 1998, at which time an electoral college comprising all who had been eligible to vote in 1988<sup>1</sup> and had remained in the territory would participate in a referendum. In the interim, the principal institutions of local government would be three semi-autonomous Provinces - the South, the North and the Loyalty Islands; the latter two being largely Kanak and pro-independence, with the former comprising mostly anti-independence settlers.

The ten-year period leading up to the referendum would be one of "development", oriented towards "rebalancing" the territory's Nouméa- and European-dominated economy. This would involve increased investment and infrastructural construction in the underdeveloped largely Kanak areas. It would be accompanied by the extensive revision of existing education and training programmes as well as the creation of new ones concentrating on the needs of the Kanak people.

The Matignon Accords are an agreement about a broad programme and a process and timetable for it to be implemented. The outcome of this process remains an open question, however, and the parties to the Accords had largely incompatible hopes and expectations as to what that outcome might be.

From the French Government's perspective, Prime Minister Michel Rocard who had brokered the agreement was quite candid. He considered that the Accords provided the framework for what he described as "a veritable economic and cultural decolonisation without any change in (French) sovereignty" [Reuter, 28 August 1988]. Rocard believed that at the end of ten years, Kanak people who had wanted independence would have come to an appreciation of the benefits of remaining a French territory. "My dearest hope" he declared "is that in 1998 the people of New Caledonia will choose to remain a part of France" [Reuter 29 August 1988].

Although the extreme-right Caledonian Front and National Front remained steadfastly opposed to

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<sup>1</sup> On the basis of a three-year residency qualification.

any compromise with the independence movement, the main anti-independence party, the Rassemblement Pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR), agreed with Rocard's assessment that independence would be an unlikely outcome of the agreement. The business community had suffered from the instability generated by the Kanak mobilisations of the 1980s and could see that the Matignon Accords posed no inherent threat to their interests. Their leader and RPCR President, Jacques Lafleur, called on his supporters "to give and to forgive". He welcomed Tjibaou's acceptance of the accords, describing him as "one of the Melanesians who has an economic conception ... which works towards advancing things and forgetting the conflicts". Asked why he waited until 1988 to make such an arrangement with the FLNKS, Lafleur replied, "I have always wanted it to happen like this. If I could have, I would have done it long ago" [Reported on RFO, 29 September 1988]. Two months earlier, an RPCR conference of one thousand delegates took just three and a half hours to agree on a unanimous endorsement of the Accords [Reuter, 24 July 1988].

By contrast, the FLNKS debated throughout two weekend meetings (at Thio on July 16 and 17 and Ouvéa a week later) before adopting a position on the Accords. Activists questioned the mandate of those who had signed the Accords. They were also concerned that the agreement was based on too long a time frame, was not sufficiently restrictive on the voting rights of new immigrants and offered no guarantee of independence. Openly divided on the issue, the FLNKS eventually resolved to continue negotiations and use the final round of talks on the Accords the following month to extract as many concessions as possible from France. Tjibaou described the FLNKS position in the following terms:

"This plan does not correspond to our objectives, but we must see to what degree we can make it work for us. All our activists support Kanak Socialist Independence, however before gaining it, we have to live" [Quoted by AFP, 25 July 1988].

The rationale was similar to that which the FLNKS had adopted in 1985, when it decided to abandon its mobilisation and participate in the Fabius Plan. The objections to the Matignon Accords were also similar to those advanced with regard to the Fabius Plan, except that when it came to the Matignon Accords they were argued with greater intensity. This was a product of the loss of life and other sacrifices in the intervening period, as well as a feeling among many activists that those involved in the FLNKS-controlled Regional governments set up under the Fabius Plan had used the resources given by the France for their own personal ends, instead of the agreed strategy of building alternative structures, key among which was the education system, Ecoles Populaires Kanak (EPK).

The low level of popular support in New Caledonia for the Accords was demonstrated when they were framed as a statute called the Rocard Plan, and put to a referendum of all French citizens in November 1988. Although all three principal parties to the Accords campaigned for a "yes" vote, only 33 per cent of enrolled voters endorsed the agreement; just over half of the combined FLNKS/RPCR vote in the September 1985 elections [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 13 September 1985]. The "no" vote, representing mainly ultra-rightist settlers, came to 25 per cent. Despite a proposed amnesty for the 115 Kanak political prisoners and although there was no organised boycott campaign, pro-independence strongholds recorded high rates of abstention; the highest being in Ouvéa itself where 54 per cent of eligible voters did not vote [see Small, 1989: pp.24-5].

The inter-Kanak conflict that was generated, or at least exacerbated by the Accords, resulted in the deaths of three major protagonists - Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Yeiwéné Yeiwéné and the person who assassinated them and was himself killed, Djubelly Wéa. The Accords also led to the departure of many FLNKS activists: some to join other political groups; most, disillusioned with all existing parties. Within the FLNKS, the struggle committees which had been the backbone of the grassroots political mobilisation were disbanded [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 10 June 1991],

and the "coordination committees" set up to replace them never functioned. After participating in the Accords at least partly because of an unfavourable *rapport de force*, the FLNKS ended up in an even weaker position.

France, by contrast, ended up exactly where it wanted to be. Besides wreaking havoc in the independence movement, the Accords allowed it to present itself in the role of benevolent moderator in a civil conflict. In effect, it was seeking to establish a variant of colonialism that would enable it to achieve the sort of hegemonic control within New Caledonia and legitimacy in the international arena that it begrudges the European communities in Australia and New Zealand.

It had been a long-held preference of President Mitterand for France to develop a more sophisticated form of colonialism in France's overseas possessions [see Clark 1991]; a view which he outlined in relation to New Caledonia in the lead-up to the 1988 presidential elections in an "Open Letter to all French":

"Independence in this state of rupture between two populations of comparable size means civil war, the only inexpiable war, and therefore the destruction of one of the two sides. One can guess which. The ridiculed right of the Canaques will be upheld and restored only by internal peace, and the guarantor of this peace and these rights can only be the French Republic" [Reproduced in Faberon, 1992: p.183].

In the years that followed the signing of the Accords, tensions between pro-independence groups and disillusionment among the wider Kanak population intensified. The LKS, an original signatory of the Accords, has since withdrawn from the agreement. It argues that, as a basic human right, independence is what it believes that the Accords embody opportunism and cronyism and have a repugnant image among Kanak youth who "are disgusted with the political class and ashamed of the degrading image of the Kanak projected by the elected officials" [LKS, 1991].

The combination of disunity and disillusionment caused a dramatic drop in electoral support for the FLNKS in the 1993 legislative elections [see Small, 1993] and saw the FLNKS lose its majority in the elections in the Islands Province in 1995. According to Rock Wamytan, the FLNKS Vice-President, Kanak people are frustrated that the emphasis on development appears to have moved independence off the agenda. Amongst the leadership, he believes:

"There is too much talk about economic development and a tendency to forget the reason we are in the institutions, the political objective of gaining independence".

The Matignon Accords gave "development" centre stage. It is, however, a highly contentious concept. It goes to the heart of the unresolved issue within the independence movement of what kind of post-colonial society the Kanak people are seeking to construct. Some long-time advocates of Kanak development have expressed alarm at a lack of clear thinking about the subject and have warned about the dangers of conservative models of development:

"Development is surely the central myth of our time. In relations between North and South or industrialised and poor countries, it serves to justify the wealth of the West at the same time as making Third World societies dream of a better world. In the Western ideological apparatus, it is the sequel to the myth of the universal church and of benevolent colonialism; used to justify the gradual extension of the European ruling classes from the Middle Ages to modern times, with the complicity in our countries of indigenous Johnny-come-latelys, blinded by the glitter of the white world" [LKS, 1991].

Since the early days of the independence movement in the 1970s, Kanak activists had warned of the dangers of neocolonial independence which has been described as "formal independence with all the political and economic power being controlled by foreign capital and a small Kanak élite of well-paid politicians, civil servants and junior business partners" [Ounei-Small, 1992: p.166]. Through the Matignon Accords, the French Government and settler business interests have been

able to make use of this concern about neocolonialism to argue that unless economic development preceded decolonisation, an independent Kanaky would not have a viable economy.

Their assumption was, however, that development in New Caledonia would be based on modernisation theory or a variation of it. Even within the FLNKS-controlled Northern Province, one finds resolutions, possibly prepared by French technocrats, borrowing directly from modernisation theory with references to "economic take-off" [Quoted in Leblic, 1993: p.232]. According to these models of development, what the territory requires are: injections of capital for the construction of infrastructure; a flood of technical advisors from France; policies that would be attractive to foreign investment; greater integration of Kanak people into the market economy; and the recruitment of a Kanak élite into management positions in the public and private sectors.

During the administration of the Fabius regions, the independence movement spoke of development being "not only a question of investment in capital but also investment in people" [*Bwenando*, Number 44: p.10] and of it being "a matter of producing to construct a country, improving the material well-being of the populations and ensuring their dignity by respecting their own values" [*Bwenando*, Number 42: p.5]. Elements of these views were reflected in the creation of the EPK and alternative media organisations like the *Bwenando* newspaper and Radio Djiido, as well strategies of establishing tribal cooperatives and small-scale community enterprises. And, notwithstanding the difficulties, the Regions and more recently the Provinces have distributed significant sums of money to a range of community applicants.

However, in the absence of an agreed vision of the content of Kanak socialist independence, let alone a theory of development for achieving it, the independence movement was left in the dangerous position of having to respond to and apply a model of development about which many activists had grave misgivings. Kanak activists have expressed concern that, in development strategies that take France as a model, the roles in which Kanak people will end up will be those of beggars and servants [Ouneï-Small, 1992: p.177].

There are widespread fears that the availability of French Government money will create a hand-out mentality among Kanak people [see interviews in Leblic, 1993: pp.389-397]. Some who have remained steadfastly opposed to the Accords, argue that this has always been a considered objective on the part of the French Government. The FLNKS-controlled Regions were more concerned with allocating funds than assessing their impact as, by their own admission, they conducted very little evaluation of the projects that they funded [*Construire*, Number 9]. This funding is also associated with a wealth of anecdotal evidence of corruption, cronyism and inappropriate allocations, such as a very large sum of money going to the construction of a petrol station on the Belep islands with only half a dozen cars [Tanham, 1990: p.16].

As Raphael Mapou, a leading figure in the FLNKS, has pointed out, the overall effect of the type of development being promoted in New Caledonia under the Matignon Accords is that, rather than preparing the territory's economy for independence, it is locking it into a position of dependence. This, he argues, will leave the country with increasingly limited options for future economic development.

However, in the name of economic realism, Kanak people are still being exhorted to follow this path. The Union Calédonienne (UC), the largest member party of the FLNKS, holds that social goals cannot be achieved without "putting in place structures and infrastructures which permit the obtaining of financial resources" and has opted for development based on a market economy. As its president, François Burck, told the party's 1991 congress:

"We are confronted by a market economy. When we say independence we place our country in a zone where there are rules. If we say no to the market economy, with what do we replace it? And if we say yes to the market economy, this assumes constraints" [*Les*

*Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 12 November 1991: p.4].

Already, the "constraints" of this model of development are being used to promote a wide range of policies, some of which have very serious political implications. Immigration, for example, which was promoted by France in the 1970s as an expressly political strategy is now being promoted as a necessity for the fulfilment of the development aims of the Matignon Accords. Calling for more immigration from Europe of "people who work well to teach people who don't know how to work" [*Pacific Report*, Volume 6 Number 13: p.4], Lafleur has declared:

"New Caledonia needs to increase its population to achieve economic growth... This is a universal economic principle, not a trap to anyone" [Reported in PACNEWS, 16 January 1991].

The FLNKS President, Paul Neaoutyine, has insisted that a distinction must be made "between these two processes - rebalancing and decolonisation" although he hopes they can both be pursued [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 27 October 1992: p.5]. He argues that the concept of socialism for an independent Kanaky must be based on "the rejection of capitalism and colonialism as it is and as it is practised today ... and include going beyond a model which is imposed as universal but which is only the Western model" [*Combat Ouvrier*, Number 8, January 1993: p.17].

Within the UC, however, there is a strong move to abandon completely the notion of Kanak socialist independence and the alternative development models which might be pursued within it. As Burck has revealed, the main obstacle is that most members of their own party do not support them:

"If we (UC) announce tomorrow that we no longer support Kanak socialist independence there will be war, because no-one will agree. Our work is to bring people to be realistic, we have to be honest with them. For us it is not a question of Kanak independence, but of what sort of independence and is it possible" [*Pacific Report*, Volume 6 Number 14: p.2]

As part of this process, Burck has begun talking about the dangers of the 1998 referendum refocusing attention back on the choice: independence, yes or no? Rather, he believes it should enable a continuation of the process that was begun by the Accords and serve as a "ratification of this consensus" [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 25 March 1991]. His views have been echoed by RPCR leader, Jacques Lafleur [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 4 February 1993: p.3]. And they also reflect the Rocardian notion of decolonisation. Nowhere is this clearer than in Burck's declaration that his understanding of independence had "evolved and is no longer taken as meaning a break with France but rather a partnership" [PACNEWS, 29 May 1991].

### **3 Kanak Educational Resistance and the Promise of Matignon**

Grievances over French education have long been a central feature in the growth of the anti-colonial movement among Kanak people. This was signalled as early as February 1969 when Nidoish Naisseline (who launched the Red Scarves later that year and is widely considered to be the founder of the modern independence movement) wrote a scathing attack on colonialism in New Caledonia. Published in the first issue of *le Canaque. Homme Libre*, Naisseline's article targeted education:

"The white community denigrates the man of colour wherever it meets him. It ridicules his parents in the eyes of the young indigène, making them guilty for not having made of him a descendant of Asterix. At school the ideal mother is always represented by a white. As youngsters, my friends and I avoided being seen by the teacher in the company of our parents. Thanks to the French school, our parents had ended up representing for us something to be shunned and forgotten in order to become a real person" [Naisseline, 1969: pp.5-6].

Through the 1970s and early 1980s, Kanak people railed against French education which they saw not as a vehicle for development, but as an instrument of domination and control. As *Groupe 1878*, one of the early radical groups, noted:

"We received domination education, that is education whose aim was not to take account of the local people's way of thinking and acting, but oriented in such a way that the traditional past be not given any emphasis" [*Andi Ma Dhô*. July 1976]

In the late 1970s, two major campaigns in particular brought educational issues to the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle: the 1976-78 occupation of a hostel for New Caledonian students in Paris by Kanak students and military conscripts; and a prolonged series of mobilisations and confrontations in response to the dismissal of Kanak or pro-Kanak teachers which challenged the educational establishment in New Caledonia from 1979 until 1981. These actions as well as the broader political movement that they grew out of fuelled, and were in turn fuelled by, a heightened level of Kanak political awareness. As both Dornoy [1984: p.263] and Ward [1982: p.49] have acknowledged, next to land, education has been the most important focus of Kanak resistance.

The educational focus of Kanak resistance reached a peak with the establishment in early 1985 of a separate schooling system under the auspices of the FLNKS. Known as the *Ecoles Populaires Kanak* (EPK), the schools were established as a Kanak-oriented and controlled education system in the wake of a boycott of colonial schools.

Relying entirely on their own resources, the EPK began enthusiastically with 46 schools, 264 volunteer *animateurs* and 1,500 pupils and a nationally coordinated structure. By the end of 1989, however, a combination of pressure from employers, the French Government and its allies and, most significantly, from within the FLNKS itself, had reduced the EPK to ten per cent of its original size<sup>1</sup>. The political demobilisation and division that the Matignon Accords wrought within the independence movement has subsequently decimated the EPK, although it should be noted that in the isolated pockets that remain such as in the north of Ouvéa, the EPK continues to be a vital community institution.

An essential aspect of the Matignon Accords was a commitment on the part of France to address Kanak educational grievances and make improvements to the education and training of Kanak people in New Caledonia. Soon after the signing of the Accords, Prime Minister Rocard described their educational aim as one of:

"making up for the 'retard' and correcting the imbalances which give rise to such a weak presence of Melanesians in the different sectors of the territory's activity, and particularly in the public service." [Reproduced in *La Dépêche Kanak*. 27 June, 1988]

Between France and those in the independence movement who supported the Accords, there was broad agreement over this aim and even over how it might be implemented. As with the overall Accords, however, the competing parties had divergent and incompatible expectations as to the ultimate impact that such an education and training strategy would have on colonial relations. Independence movement leaders stress the need to enhance the skills and knowledge of Kanak people in preparation for their accession to independence.

In the wake of the Matignon Accords, Tjibaou appealed to Kanak people "to become better trained and educated in order to cope with greater responsibilities". Accompanying the French Prime Minister on a tour of the territory to promote the Accords, he declared:

"People have to be better trained in management skills: management of the cooperatives, the shops, and to become more involved in the economy so that when the time comes ... to

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed account of the rise and fall of the EPK is contained in the author's 1994 Ph.D. dissertation, "The Politics of Colonial Education in New Caledonia".

take up the sovereignty of our country, we have the necessary tools in our hands" [Speech by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in Poindimié, 26 August, 1988].

France was very willing to oblige. On the same tour, Rocard explained the importance of the renewed emphasis on education to an assembly of Kanak high school pupils:

"New Caledonia tomorrow, and even more so in ten years, will need farmers and workers of course, but also trades people and drivers, veterinarians and engineers, teachers and doctors. ... From this year, the state is going to launch an important programme to improve the training you receive. Your teachers will be able to benefit from extra training. School texts will be printed to better relate the history, geography and environment of New Caledonia. ... Education and training are the keys to development. Whatever destiny New Caledonia may choose in ten years, this territory and its different communities need economic, social, cultural and administrative leaders who are ambitious for themselves and for their country" [Speech by Michel Rocard in Lifou, 24 August, 1988].

Education was just as important an element in France's strategy of engaging in the Accords as it was for the FLNKS. However, Rocard hoped and expected that, rather than strengthening the movement of Kanak people for independence, educational reform would contribute to a more hegemonic French influence in the territory. It would achieve this by more effectively integrating Kanak people into the political, economic and socio-cultural structures of the territory.

In an initial outline of the post-Matignon educational strategy, the French prime Minister focused on three programmes. First, state-funded youth employment schemes would aim to train 4,000 people per year by involving them in community development projects. The second initiative was aimed at middle and senior management training. Through a programme named "*Operation 400 Cadres*", four hundred Kanak people would be specially trained over a period of ten years to prepare them for positions of responsibility in the economy, local administration, communication and services. Finally, the territory's resource of teaching personnel would be augmented through the training of fifty assistant teachers every year for five years [Speech by Michel Rocard in Canala, 27 August, 1988].

Three months after the Rocard tour and immediately following the referendum on the Rocard Plan, Lionel Jospin visited New Caledonia; the first such visit by any French education minister. Stressing what he described as the progress of the last few years, Jospin nonetheless acknowledged the "undeniable inadequacies of our school system". These he described as the very high rate of repeating classes, a generalised failure at school and the lack of equality of educational opportunity, especially for Kanak pupils.

Jospin called for greater efforts to adapt education to New Caledonian realities. He identified three ways in which this could be achieved: teaching of pupils' mother tongues; teaching geography, history, economics and civil institutions from a local perspective; and giving greater recognition to local cultures, particularly Melanesian culture. Rather than abandoning French programmes and texts, he argued, "they must be enriched and adapted to take account of geographic and economic realities which are yours, of your history and your life" [*La Dépêche Kanak*, Number 184].

In 1991, the Vice-Rectorat prepared a special report on education in New Caledonia. Written in English, the report was destined for an international and probably a South Pacific audience. Discussing the aims of post-Matignon educational reforms in the territory, it notes:

"The reduction of the difficulties and problems due to cultural, social and linguistic environment and their consequence on schooling, the *full integration of all pupils in the school system* (emphasis in original) where they are accommodated, the realisation of the gap which separates the school world from its environment and the total implication of all school partners which, in many respects, affects its improvement, all these factors show the needs of a larger and more diversified educational action, more rooted in its

environment, and given their place to the needs of adults and of learners who have left the school system and to the needs of opening to the economic world, to the role which the Territory holds or must hold today or tomorrow in its regional environment" (sic) [Vice-Rectorat, 1991b: p.6].

## 4 Curriculum Content and Citizenship

One aspect of educational reform involved the school curriculum. Until the 1980s, the entire content of the curriculum in New Caledonia was determined in mainland France, and the courses available to pupils in the territory were a subset of those offered in French schools. In response to protests that this was inappropriate and alienating for Kanak children, the post-Matignon period has seen efforts being made to adapt the curriculum to local realities. There appears to be a serious risk, however, that the new notion of citizenship being promoted by these curriculum changes will make the school an even more effective instrument of colonialism.

The reforms of the curriculum have been of two main kinds: moves have been made to extend the teaching of Kanak languages in schools; and new teaching materials have been developed for a range of subjects, such as history and geography, with a local orientation.

### Kanak Languages in Schools

The first attempts to introduce Kanak languages in schools were made in the 1970s by church educational bodies. In 1972 the Protestant educational authority, *l'Alliance Scolaire de l'Eglise Evangelique*, tried to introduce Ajië into Nédivin Collège in Haouilou. According to Gasser [1979], this effort failed because of a lack of trained teachers and interested pupils. Four years later its Catholic counterpart, *la Direction de l'Enseignement Catholique*, introduced Ajië into a Nouméa collège. In 1977, as political pressure was mounting, the Vice-Rectorat established a *Commission des Langues Vernaculaires* [Rivierre, 1985]. State involvement increased further in 1979 under the Dijoud Plan with training being provided in France by the *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* (INALCO) and the creation in New Caledonia of the *Centre Territorial de Recherche et de Documentation Pédagogique* (CTRDP).

In 1981, the Vice-Rector estimated that, by 1985, this work would have culminated in the introduction of Kanak languages in state lycées where they would be taught as baccalauréat subjects [Bruel, 1981]. Such a policy had already been implemented in the neighbouring territory of French Polynesia with the Tahitian language [Rivierre, 1985: p.1715]. However, it was not until 1984 that the prohibition on the teaching of Kanak languages in schools was formally lifted in New Caledonia, through the application of a June 1982 memo from the French Education Minister, Alain Savary [Waheo et al, 1989: p.51]. And it took until 1992 for the Vice-Rectorat to follow the lead of private secondary schools a few years earlier and introduce two Kanak languages, Drehu and Ajië, into state lycées. These languages have also been approved as "living second language" subjects at the baccalauréat level [ITSEE, 1991: p.40]. Similar delays were also experienced with regard to moves towards introducing Kanak languages in primary schools and teaching French as a second language for non-francophone children.

It should be noted, however, that Kanak people have indicated a range of concerns about these developments. From its origins in the 1970s, many activists felt uncomfortable with what they perceived to be an excessive degree of state control of or at least influence over such a crucial aspect of Kanak culture and identity. These feelings are echoed by current concerns. Some activists are worried about the central role that schools, as opposed to parents, are assuming in the rehabilitation of Kanak languages in the post-Matignon period. And a group of Kanak people who have been working on Kanak languages have identified a number of "inherent problems" in the incorporation of Kanak languages into the curriculum. These include:

1. reticence on the part of elders with regard to the written which fossilises the Word: the Word is life;
2. feelings of the usurpation of the prerogatives and the role of the elders, the holders of traditional knowledge;
3. and fear of the devaluing of this knowledge through its integration into the school

and responsibility for it being assumed by teachers, who carry Western knowledge but have not mastered all that is to be known in their own culture" [Waheo et al, 1989: p.50].

Even more bluntly, the LKS views the integration of Kanak languages into schools as a means of "bringing the young Kanak to a better understanding of and appreciation of the fable of the crow and the fox and the three little pigs". It argues that the authorities are orienting their efforts towards:

"... how to use the custom and a particular conception of development to ensure a better acceptance of French domination. It is clear that, taken together, the political leaders, top civil servants and church authorities think that the preservation of Kanaks as a human group within the French Republic can only be temporary and that sooner or later it will be integrated into white Caledonian society" [LKS, 1991].

A common theme which underlies these concerns is that the teaching of Kanak languages through the medium of a formal education system remains problematic unless that system genuinely reflects and advances the interests and aspirations of the Kanak community of which it is an essential part. In other words, Kanak people recognise that French schooling promotes a notion of citizenship that belongs to a culture and society other than their own and other than that of which their languages are an inextricable part. The insertion of particular elements of Kanak culture does not, in itself, alter the fundamental orientation of an otherwise alien education system.

### **"New Caledonian" Text Books in Schools**

The production of school text books has long been recognised as a means of exerting an influence over a society. Altbach [1982: pp.479-480] highlights this in relation to the United States and Britain which each pumped millions of books into Third World countries in the 1950s and 60s. In New Caledonia, the production of new text books with a local orientation has been one of the main post-Matignon educational initiatives. The stated aim has been to tailor texts to the specificities of the New Caledonian situation rather than simply importing them from France. The CTRDP is the principal state institution responsible for implementing this policy. However, the Vice-Rectorat has endorsed school publications from other sources.

One example of this is a school text produced in March 1992 on the history of New Caledonia and France [Société d'Etudes Historique de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1992]. Aimed at upper-primary and lower secondary school pupils, the forty-two chapter book includes an endorsement from the Vice-Rector of the territory, J M Barre. Hailing the publication as representing a change of perspective, Barre notes:

"The history of France is not seen here from Paris from Bordeaux or from Marseille; it is seen from New Caledonia. Thus, the discoverers do not leave, they arrive" [SEHNC, 1992: p.2].

With regard to the history of New Caledonia, he describes the book as a new tool which enables the teacher to integrate New Caledonian history into what it describes as "broader educational perspectives" and "general history". Today's New Caledonian child, he writes, is the product of an encounter of several traditions, cultures and historical and human currents. "To neglect one of these currents in the action of education would be to impoverish that action".

What the book contains, however, is an entirely sanitised and pro-colonial account of New Caledonian history. The only mention of any form of Kanak resistance to French colonialism is a chapter devoted to the 1878 revolt [pp.88-90]. For the Kanak people, according to this account, the arrival of sailors and traders had "upturned their way of life through the importing of new objects and marvellous instruments". As for the causes of the revolt itself, the book ignores all evidence of colonial excesses, which even the official report of General Trentinian in 1879

acknowledged<sup>1</sup>. Rather, the blame is placed on a combination of drought and a misunderstanding arising from the actions of one civil servant.

The illustrations, of which Barre spoke so highly, also reveal the colonial bias of the chapter. They consist of: a small drawing of "a New Caledonian guerrilla at the end of the nineteenth century"; a sketch entitled, "Canaque insurrection. View of the Boizot (early settler victims of the uprising) homestead the day after the massacre"; and a photograph of a group of French soldiers and allied Kanak fighters who suppressed the resistance movement. The caption reads:

"During the rebellion of 1878, some indigenous volunteers and European civilians, with their respective weapons, were under adjoined to the armed forces for the pacification" [SEHNC, 1992: p.88].

The chapter dealing with political developments in the territory from 1951 through to the post-Matignon period does not even mention the word "independence", let alone acknowledge the reassertion of Kanak political demands. Moreover, this chapter contains no reference to New Caledonia's place in the Pacific, despite its title, "New Caledonia, Territory of the Pacific". And wherever the Pacific is depicted in maps, even referring to the contemporary period, colonial names that were abandoned more than a decade earlier are still used for Pacific Island states such as New Caledonia's nearest neighbour, the former French/British condominium of Vanuatu.

Despite its claims to focus particularly on those aspects of French history with relevance to New Caledonia and to place local history in a wider context, the book contains only passing reference to the independence of other French colonies, accompanied by an emphasis on their continued and beneficial attachment to France. By contrast, French colonial expansion is portrayed in detail and in a very positive light.

What the production of these new texts reveals is an attempt to redefine citizenship. The notion of citizenship being promoted is no longer crudely French; it is, in the first instance, New Caledonian. It reflects, however, a conception of being New Caledonian that is consistent with the pro-colonial interpretation of the Matignon Accords, and inconsistent with Kanak nationalist aspirations. By this view, the colonisation of New Caledonia (to the extent that it is acknowledged) is an historical fact. Kanak nationalists, by contrast, view it as an ongoing process. The new history book portrays New Caledonia as a multicultural collection of different ethnic communities with equal legitimacy and rights and compatible interests. This contrasts with the nationalist view which insists that, as an indigenous and colonised people, the Kanak have particular rights.

Publications such as this claim to show New Caledonia to itself. What they actually do is present a view of the territory which is comforting to pupils from pro-colonial backgrounds and fundamentally disturbing to the children of Kanaky.

## **5 Addressing Kanak Educational Underachievement**

Equality of opportunity is the declared objective of New Caledonia's education system in the post-Matignon period. From the outset, the Vice-Rectorat appeared supremely confident that this could be and was being achieved, stressing that the fulfilment of this objective did not involve a qualitative change in the way it ran secondary education in New Caledonia. Rather, it saw the task as continuing and supplementing the good work in which it was already engaged.

In 1981, in the face of statistics that showed serious Kanak educational underachievement, the Vice-Rectorat declared that its efforts since 1965 had produced "spectacular results". Despite what it called a "slight disparity" in achievement rates between various ethnic groups, it gave an

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the report can be found in Dousset [1970].

assurance that "this gap is in the process of narrowing" and that what was needed was a continuation of the existing educational strategy [Bruel, 1981]. The declaration of the Vice-Rectorat in February 1989 presents a very similar account:

"The flow of pupils and the school results (orientation at the end of third grade, *brevet des collèges* pass rates, numbers in the *lycées*, *baccalauréat* statistics) show ... that secondary education has already improved its results in a significant way. It is a matter therefore of accentuating and generalising this progress, notably in the areas where it has been the less pronounced, and implementing a strategy capable of bringing the greatest possible number of pupils through to the "terminal"<sup>1</sup> class or to the point of acquiring real training" [Vice-Rectorat, 1989b: p.29].

Within this approach, the Vice-Rectorat undertook a number of initiatives. These have included: the expansion and improvement of facilities through constructing new schools and upgrading existing ones; the use of the medium of television through the opening of *Télévision Educative de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (TVENC); the improvement of the territory's teaching workforce through a December 1988 ruling that even relieving teachers would be required to have a *baccalauréat*, as well as the opening of new *Centres de Développement Pédagogiques* (CDP) in Touho and Mou to provide in-service teacher training; the establishment of *Secteurs de Développement Educatif Concerté* (SDEC) including the creation of six new *Zones d'Education Prioritaires* (ZEP) as well as a special plan Z for the politically-troublesome island of Ouvéa; an increase in the provision of pre-school education; the extension of *Innovation, Soutien, Aide au Travail Scolaire* (Plan ISAT) to include 64 schools by 1992; a renewed emphasis on the *Annexes de Lycée d'Enseignement Professionnel* or ALEPs, including granting them official status (they had originally been constituted as experimental institutions), evaluating their objectives and developing training programmes for their teaching staff; and the establishment of a programme of continuing adult education and training.

To manage these and other programmes, existing bodies such as the CTRDP have been strengthened and a host of new ones have been established including the *Commission d'Observation et de Suivi des Actions Pédagogique* (COSAP), a *Centre de Conseil d'Action Pédagogique - Recherche Action en Formation d'Adultes* (CCAPRA), and within the Vice-Rectorat itself, a *Mission d'Action Culturelle en Milieu Scolaire*, a *Mission d'Enseignement du Français* and a *Mission aux Langues et Cultures Régionales*.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the merits of each of the above programmes. And it is not yet possible to isolate and quantify the extent to which they have met their own objectives or the overall aims of educational reform within the framework of the Matignon Accords. However, considerable material is available on one of these initiatives and it is also possible to assess the claimed successes of the overall approach.

### **Programme d'Enrichissement Instrumental**

One of the main new initiatives, the *Programme d'Enrichissement Instrumental*<sup>2</sup> (PEI), is a strategy for combating educational failure. This programme takes the form of a series of fifteen exercises or "instruments" which take two to three hundred hours to complete, that is, two years if three or four sessions are conducted per week. The PEI has six stated aims:

1. to correct deficient intellectual functions;
2. to cause the acquisition of indispensable concepts and relations (left/right high/low before/after relations) which are the prerequisites to mental operations;
3. to develop personal motivation by prolonging in the living milieu acquisitions made through this programme;

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<sup>1</sup> *la classe terminale* is the highest class in a *lycée* in which the *baccalauréat* is sat.

<sup>2</sup> Programme of Instrumental Enrichment.

4. to develop processes of internalised reflection regarding the relations between an action and its results, data to collect and strategies to implement;
5. to develop the motivation to succeed, to work for enjoyment and to discover that success is possible;
6. to develop autonomy of behaviour and move the pupil from an attitude of passivity to one that is more active and creative, starting from its own successes" [Vice-Rectorat, 1989b: p.21].

The Vice-Rectorat has made a substantial investment in this programme. In 1989, the PEI was introduced into every *collège* in the territory, with one teacher from most institutions and two from the larger ones being given specialist training in how to implement it [Vice-Rectorat, 1989a]. From 1989 to 1992, two more groups of teachers including those from the private schools were given the training, which was provided through the University of Paris V. In 1992, steps were taken to extend the programme to cover the territory's *lycées* [Vice-Rectorat, 1992b: pp.28-9]. The Vice-Rectorat was so impressed with the programme that it sent one European teacher from New Caledonia to a training workshop in Jerusalem with the founder of the programme, and President of the *Conseil Scientifique du Centre International d'Etude*, Professor Reuven Feuerstein [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 25 February 1992: p.4]. On his return he was given a permanent position in Nouméa as the territorial trainer of PEI practitioners

The PEI, like so many specialised learning programmes that have emerged in recent decades, appeals to cultural deprivation theory as the explanation of educational underachievement. The Vice-Rectorat explicitly and uncritically accepts this view. The claim is:

"Many pupils, considered deficient or slow in light of what they produce, are actually unable to perform the tasks they are set because of a lack of 'cognitive modifiability', which is itself the result of a phenomenon of cultural deprivation. This situation is reversible and cognitive modifiability can be developed through mediated learning which is the aim of the PEI" [Vice-Rectorat, 1992a: p.21].

This explanation of educational underachievement and its solutions mirrors in several ways the broader model of development being pursued under the Matignon Accords: it is based directly on a decades-old model which has been found wanting in its application in other comparable contexts; it has been developed and is being applied with little or no involvement on the part of Kanak people; it proposes a technocratic solution to a complex socio-political problem; and it reinforces the position of France and French institutions in the role of expert and provider.

In a more specifically educational context, it is susceptible to the many criticisms to which cultural deprivation theory has been subjected: its élitist view of desirable cultural traits; its denigration of the cultural personality of dominated groups; and its blame-the-victim approach to educational underachievement. In effect, the PEI treats educational underachievers as though they are a collection of individual patients who need to have their thought patterns rewired and their attitudes reprogrammed.

Do Kanak parents want their children to be subjected to programmes which are specifically designed to undermine or remove thoughts, values or attitudes which are an integral product of the children's upbringing within Kanak culture, but which are deemed to be educationally undesirable? The thrust of Kanak objections to colonial education over the last twenty years would indicate that they do not, and there is no evidence of their having been consulted in any meaningful way by the Vice-Rectorat with regard to the introduction of the PEI. No doubt, however, the policy is proceeding on the basis of passing over the collective hopes of Kanak parents for the collective good of the Kanak people, and reinforcing the individual desires of individual Kanak parents for their own children to achieve.

In this regard, however, there is no evidence of the PEI being adapted to meet particular Kanak needs. Despite France's commitments in the Matignon Accords to addressing the problem of

Kanak underachievement, public declarations from the Vice-Rectorat describe the PEI's objectives in general and not Kanak-specific terms. It is difficult to see, therefore, how this particular programme can be defined as part of France's commitments to "ethnic rebalancing" in education. Statistics released concerning assistance given by the newly created CCAPRA (outlined above) to baccalauréat students reveal that of the twenty-two candidates to pass the exam (out of an original pool of forty-six), less than half were either Kanak or Wallisian [Vice-Rectorat, 1992b: p.18].

The extent to which the Vice-Rectorat is emphasising the programme indicates that their fundamental assumptions about the causes of Kanak underachievement, especially in regard to cultural deprivation theory, have progressed little since the 1970s when the principal of Nouméa's only lycée declared that the main obstacle to Kanak educational success was their "faulty use of the French language" but that this and other difficulties were "being ironed out" [Senes, 1971: p.22]. Whatever else it may do, the technocratic approach of the PEI has been introduced and is being applied in such a way as to reinforce France's ability to project itself as the expert in overcoming differences in educational achievement.

### Measurements of Success

It is worth noting at this point that there is no evidence of a significant closing of the gap between Kanak and European educational attainment in New Caledonia in recent years. Only one of the commonly used points of measurement, entry to Sixth Grade, has shown any marked convergence in Kanak and European achievement rates and this was a function of the European rate approximating one hundred per cent (and thus being unable to continue to improve) and a political decision to, in effect, abandon this particular examination as a selection mechanism. When it comes to the vital baccalauréat exam, the statistics [see Figure One] reveal a slight tendency for Kanak and European pass rates to come together between 1981 and 1992.

FIGURE ONE:

However, what this picture does not reveal is that some baccalauréats are more equal than others. The *Baccalauréat de l'Enseignement du Second Degré* (BESD), which includes series A to E and pursues studies with a higher degree of theory and abstraction, is considerably more prestigious than the *Baccalauréat de Technicien* (BTN) or the *Baccalauréat Professionnel* (BCP). Between 1988 and 1992, 63 per cent of the baccalauréats gained by European students were BESDs while the corresponding figure for Kanak pupils was 42 per cent. Thus, whereas the total number of baccalauréats gained by Europeans during this period (2,107) was over four times the corresponding Kanak figure (495), when it came to the high status BESD there were six times as many European pupils. Furthermore, within the BESD, the élite Series C baccalauréat was dominated by European pupils. European pupils consistently comprise between 80 and 90 per cent of those passing the baccalauréat in Series C compared to Kanak figures of between one and five per cent.

Also unseen in Figure One is the rate at which pupils exit the school system before reaching the point of sitting the baccalauréat. Figure Two shows the progression since 1965 of the numbers of those in each ethnic group who obtain the baccalauréat as a percentage of those for that group who originally qualified to enter secondary school. The figure takes account of neither the large numbers of (especially Kanak) pupils who failed or dropped out before sitting the secondary school entrance exam nor the marked differences between the various types of baccalauréat. Despite these omissions which would have made the observed trend even more pronounced, there is a very clear and growing differential between Kanak and European secondary school performances.

FIGURE TWO:

In the face of this evidence, the Vice-Rectorat was continuing in 1991 to maintain as it had since 1981 [see Bruel], that:

"These different data, and in particular the favourable evolution of the increasing rates clearly confirm the improvement as a whole of the school system in New Caledonia and even attest a true speeding-up of this progress" (sic) [Vice-Rectorat, 1991b: p.3].

It uses very questionable methods of selecting and present data to support its claim to be successfully meeting the aims of "contributing as much as it can and should to the construction of the country's future" by orienting itself "towards the struggle against educational exclusion and inequality and for success at school and by school" [Vice-Rectorat, 1992c: p.9]. Because much of the data are presented only by province or by educational establishment, it is possible only to approximate the relevant Kanak statistics. No ethnic breakdown was given of the rates of pupils repeating classes [Vice-Rectorat, 1992b: p.21]. Furthermore, although there was a clear overall improvement in these rates, there is no discussion of the extent to which they are affected by pupils being channelled out of collèges and into the growing number of vocational institutions where they study for less prestigious qualifications.

The Vice-Rectorat made much of the increase in numbers of pupils in the first cycle (sixth to third grades) of secondary school. Special attention was drawn to the particularly high rates in the Kanak-dominated Northern and Islands Provinces [Vice-Rectorat, 1992b: p.16]. However, these figures reflected little more than the effective removal of the secondary school entrance examination as a selection mechanism, as noted above.

When it comes to analysis of the crucial baccalauréat statistics, the Vice-Rectorat's publication subtitled "Evolution and Rebalancing: Elements of Evaluation" [Vice-Rectorat, 1992b] makes a total of thirteen comments. Of these, eleven contain no mention of disparities between provinces or ethnic groups. The one commentary that does focus on Kanak baccalauréat results ignores the substantial drop in the Kanak pass rate from 1990 to 1991 (41.4 per cent to 37.5 per cent) and highlights the fact that "around one hundred" Kanak pupils passed the exam each year (96 in 1990 and 93 in 1991). Furthermore, it adds a false claim that of these Kanak students to have passed the baccalauréat, "a proportion greater than ever" gained the prestigious BESD [Vice-Rectorat,

1992b: p.18]. In fact, the proportion of Kanak BESDs among the total baccalauréats to be awarded to Kanak students had fallen steadily: from 50.0 per cent in 1989, to 46.5 per cent in 1990, to 34.4 per cent in 1991.

In a manoeuvre that placed the Kanak baccalauréat figures in the most favourable light, the Vice-Rectorat chose not to compare them with the corresponding European statistics. Rather, they were compared with the appalling figures of the past: 19 Kanak passes in 1979, 30 in 1981, 62 in 1984 and 71 in 1988. It also fails to mention drops in the numbers of Kanak pupils passing the baccalauréat in 1986 (from 80 down to 58) and 1988 (from 76 down to 71). When the Vice-Rectorat presented these figures for overseas consumption in an English-language publication, however, statistical manipulation became misrepresentation. Taken directly from the publication concerned [Vice-Rectorat, 1991b: p.7], Figure Three portrays an uninterrupted upward progression by using a mix of two- three- and four-year intervals and omitting years for which the data did not correspond with the desired pattern.

FIGURE THREE:

**Facsimile of a Vice-Rectorat graph on Kanak Baccalauréat Results:**

Although it acknowledges the existence of some residual disequilibrium, the Vice-Rectorat declared itself generally satisfied with the results:

"The current figures confirm the existence of a **sufficient** (my emphasis) number of *lauréats*<sup>1</sup> in all ethnic groups - and notably Melanesian *lauréats* - to advance effectively to all the forms of higher education - which is important - in order to constitute the cadres of tomorrow as well as the teaching corps, and above all else to join the ranks of teachers in the Provinces where there is a lower proportion of qualified teachers" [Vice-Rectorat, 1992b: p.18].

The Vice-Rectorat's latest attempt to conceal what one might reasonably expect to be embarrassing data is to simply fail to release, if indeed they are continuing to record, the offending statistics. The Vice-Rectorat's annual publication of exam results, *Statistiques Examens*, has since 1993 contained no ethnic break-down of educational statistics.

## **6. Education and Training for Development: Operation 400 Cadres**

In 1984, two high-ranking officials with responsibility for education in French overseas domains, described the *brevet*<sup>2</sup> in New Caledonia as "a diploma held in high esteem by the islanders and regarded as an appropriate standard for most children to reach" [Laurens and Vareille, 1984:

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<sup>1</sup> holders of a baccalauréat

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the *Brevet d'Etudes du Premier Cycle* (BEPC) which has since been replaced by the *Diplôme Nationale du Brevet* (DNDB)

p.118]. Today, the *brevet* has lost much of its value as a school-leaving qualification. Growing numbers of private and public institutions in the territory, including the Vice-Rectorat itself, will accept nothing less than a baccalauréat for prospective employees. And with this trend, the issue of tertiary education has begun to come into sharper focus.

Of the select group of Kanak students who succeed in obtaining their baccalauréat, an even smaller group continue to pursue tertiary studies. Of this successful minority Kanak students who enter university in France, between seventy and seventy-five percent drop out before completing their course of study. Even at the newly opened Université Française du Pacifique (UFP) in Nouméa, only ten out of seventy-four enrolled Kanak students in the institution's first three years (1987-90) obtained a qualification [Zappi, 1992]. The head of mission at the DOM-TOM Ministry, Christian Dubreuil, has gone as far as declaring:

"The UFP remains a white university where segregation is still strong" [*Le Monde de l'Education*, April 1992: p.22].

Thus, despite the belief by the Vice-Rectorat in New Caledonia that "educational development must be an integrated aspect of the overall development of the territory" [Vice-Rectorat, 1991a: p.10], it has been severely lacking in delivering advanced qualifications and training to Kanak students. In an attempt to address this, a key educational measure introduced by the Matignon Accords was "*Operation 400 Cadres*". The objectives of the programme, which aimed to train forty Kanak<sup>1</sup> people each year for ten years for positions of middle and senior management, was spelled out in a letter from the DOM-TOM Ministry to the French High Commissioner in Nouméa:

"The aim of this programme, which concerns particularly Kanak cadres, is the rebalancing of the exercise of responsibilities in the territory. It is a matter, therefore, of training cadres who will be able, after training, to be employed in positions of responsibility in the economic, social and cultural life as well as the administrative life of the territory, and to contribute to its influence in the geographic zone of the Pacific."

The programme would involve people aged from twenty-two and forty, who would pursue defined courses of advanced study and training for between one and five years. Applications would be considered by the 400 Cadres Commission, a group of fifteen including local government officials and representatives of unions, employer groups and educational bodies [*Objectif Cadres*, Number 6 January 1992: p.2]. This commission would select which applicants to interview (of the 231 applicants in 1990, 104 or forty-five per cent were interviewed for forty positions) and, on the basis of these interviews as well as discussions with employers and consideration of available courses, forward a recommendation to the Ministry in Paris where the ultimate selection is made [*Objectif Cadres*, Number 2 February 1990: pp.1,4].

When the trainees arrive at their destination, they are provided with a welcome, accommodation, transport, subscriptions to relevant journals and other incidentals and a special tutor is made available to them. They also receive a generous allowance. As one recipient, Philippe Yeiwéné, remarked:

"Without financial problems, with a well-defined study objective and the guarantee of a worthwhile job, the verdict is pretty positive" [*Le Monde de l'Education*, April 1992: p.22].

By the end of 1992, 161 people had received or been selected to receive training [*Le Monde*, 4 February 1993]. Of these, all except one WESTPAC employee who was attending an internal WESTPAC course in Australia, had attended French institutions. Of the first 131 trainees, 75 per cent were Kanak and 82 per cent men. Of the 85 trainees to return to New Caledonia by the end

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<sup>1</sup> Rocard had originally referred to "four hundred Melanesian cadres", however this was later amended to be *mainly* Melanesian on the grounds of wishing to avoid "encouraging racial discrimination" [*Reveil Kanak*. Number 2 November 1989: p.4].

of 1992, 61 (or 72 per cent) had passed their prescribed courses. In the eight editions to December 1992 of *Objectif Cadres*, which describes itself as the "liaison newsletter of the '400 Cadres' Programme", there is no ethnic breakdown of pass rates. An unpublished FLNKS discussion paper of the programme reports that of the first 75 Kanak trainees, 31 were still pursuing their studies, 24 had successfully completed them and returned to the territory and 20 had failed.

*Operation 400 Cadres* has attracted criticism of two types from independence activists. Some have questioned the entire foundation of the operation. Others point to its limitations; the fact that relatively short-term training courses will not increase the number of Kanak doctors<sup>1</sup> for which seven to eight years tertiary education is needed, or the fact that the entry criteria are pitched too high for an under-qualified Kanak population.

One undeniable effect of *Operation 400 Cadres* is that it will accentuate inequalities among Kanak people. This can be clearly seen in the selection criteria. Apart from a few exceptions, trainees are drawn from the small group of Kanak who have already succeeded in the French education system by obtaining their baccalauréat. What is more, another selection criterion is that trainees must already be employed and be assured to return to that or another specified position on their return. The combination of these two criteria ensures that any individual benefits from the programme will accrue to only a very small group of Kanak people who are already relatively privileged.

The restrictive criteria for the programme also impose severe limitations on the programme's own objectives by making it very difficult to find sufficient numbers of Kanak people who qualify for selection. The 1989 census revealed a total of only 664 Kanak holders of the baccalauréat fully sixty percent of whom came from Lifou (278) or Maré (117) [Arréghini and Waniez, 1993: p.89]. By extending the criteria to include others, for example those who had sat but failed the baccalauréat, this figure would increase significantly - to around 1,400, less those who had sat the exam more than once. It would also have the potential to encourage a fairer geographic spread of trainees.

Recruitment difficulties led at the end of 1992 to the extension of the selection criteria to include a limited number of trainees under the age of 22 who had fulfilled a number of strict educational requirements [*Objectif Cadres*, Number 7]. However, at a meeting of the committee established to oversee the application of the Matignon Accords, the FLNKS President, Paul Neaoutyine, expressed concern that *Operation 400 Cadres* was getting bogged down because of a lack of candidates and he called for more good-will to be shown through a further relaxation of the selection criteria to "take account of the level of general training of the Kanak élite" [*Kanak*, Number 151, November 1992: p.14].

Models of "development" which focus on the training of élites are, however, fraught with difficulties. The assumption upon which such strategies are based is that the specialised training will benefit not only the individuals who receive it, but also the wider community. Already, those who have participated in *Operation 400 Cadres* have been accused of failing to apply their training back in the community. "Those who return", declared Roger Pouityela, "have no idea about their role and are not participating in any action for development" [*Le Monde de l'Education*, April 1992: p.22].

Whereas in post-independence contexts the wider community to benefit from the training would be nationally defined, in New Caledonia the expectation is that the interests of the Kanak people in general will be advanced by the creation of a better trained Kanak élite. However, conflicts of interest between Kanak élites and the broader Kanak populations can easily emerge. Indeed, the

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<sup>1</sup> The single qualified Kanak doctor is practising in France.

widespread phenomenon of neocolonialism is predicated on precisely such a conflict among colonised peoples. The French Government and settler business interests are enthusiastic about the need for a Kanak élite [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 14 September 1992: p.2]. Jacques Lafleur has stressed the importance of creating a "Melanesian élite which is able to understand what must and must not be done and thereby transmit this message to others" [*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 28 September 1992: p.3]. As with the reform of the school curriculum, *Operation 400 Cadres* appears to have been designed to appease Kanak people who have long criticised the failure of the selective French education system to make high level skills available to them. Many of their Kanak critics, however, have branded the programme as a "charm operation by French neo-colonialism".

They are concerned about the danger of the programme being used as a cooption mechanism. Those who are given specialist training will end up with an even greater interest in preserving the status quo. Conscious of the effect of this in other colonial contexts, France and its pro-colonial allies could justifiably expect that some if not most of the new Kanak élites will simply join the ranks of the existing élite. Their class interests, it is hoped, would override their national or ethnic interests and they would either abandon or significantly alter whatever commitment they might have had to radical structural change. This outcome is even more likely when the cooption exercise is accompanied by a political demobilisation, such as that which has been generated by the Matignon Accords in New Caledonia.

Kanak activists are left facing a dilemma. Almost without exception, they recognise that Kanak people are in need of developing their collective base of skills and knowledge. However, fast-track approaches to skills shortages run the grave risk, as outlined above, of being counter-productive to what activists perceive to be the interests of Kanak society overall.

Some see a possible resolution in a greater emphasis on what might be termed "citizenship" functions of education; that is, focusing on levels of involvement in and commitment to struggles for the broader collective good. Within the EPK, for example, in addition to assessments of competence, explicitly political criteria were applied in choosing who would undertake specialised training overseas. Similarly, Gabriel Moenteapo has argued that technical training is rendered meaningless or even counter-productive unless it is organised in the context of clear, collectively defined social ends:

"Why do we train people? If we create engineers who will go and explode bombs in Moruroa, or we create doctors who are compromised with the pharmaceutical companies? If we create people who are incapable of saying that this system of values on which the current world is based is not good, and who submit themselves to every decision because the rules say this or that. These are cadres for whom, for what class interests, for what society, for what world?"

Ultimately, however, no matter how rigorously they are applied to programmes like *Operation 400 Cadres*, citizenship considerations cannot be expected to provide a substantial enough counterweight to the magnification of class differences.

## 7 Conclusion

The Matignon Accords were entered into by elements within the independence movement who were, in a fundamental sense, acting under duress. In an equally fundamental sense, the Accords represent not only a concession of the Kanak independence movement's inability to force France to grant independence, but also a denial of the capacity of Kanak people to function and develop independently of France. As such, the Accords are a classic example of Blaut's concept of independence being presented (where it is finally conceded) not as a fruit of struggle, but as a graduation ceremony [Blaut 1987: p.22]. To continue the metaphor, it could be said that the political, economic and social courses of study which must precede this graduation have been

designed to ensure the ongoing allegiance of the graduate.

The model of development embodied in the Accords is having a marked impact on colonial relations to the detriment of the Kanak independence movement. Contrary to the ideals the movement was founded to promote, the Accords are leading Kanak people to become increasingly integrated into and dependent on colonial structures and institutions. At the same time, they are generating unprecedented levels of class division among Kanak people.

Within these divisions and uncertainties, many colonial dimensions of New Caledonian education are being reinforced. Despite the numerous policies and programmes that have been introduced or strengthened, the Vice-Rectorat maintains that it has not undergone any significant change in orientation. For decades, they have aimed to integrate Kanak people into colonial society. In the context of a political strategy which endorses this emphasis, the integration process is now able to be pursued even more effectively as it can be legitimated by reference to its adhesion to an agreed programme of socio-economic development and political consensus.

A prime rationale for those within the independence movement who entered into the Accords was that an unfavourable balance of power left them little option. However, as the ten-year time-frame of the Matignon Accords nears an end, developments in the territory and particularly those in the education sector, appear to be leaving the Kanak people in an even less favourable position.

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