The Struggle for Liberation in the South Pacific

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The South Pacific — an imperialist lake?

In terms of international politics, the South Pacific is one of the most isolated and unknown areas in the world. It has been and remains an imperialist lake, almost untouched by the winds of the colonial revolution which brought Africa, Asia and Latin America into centre stage in world politics. For the imperialists it is the last colonial paradise: the fabulous South Seas of Gauguin, of Bali Hai, and coconut palms. More recently, it has been the scene of a new tourist invasion from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the USA and even from western Europe. American and Australian millionaires still continue to sail from island to island in their yachts, the Japanese fishing fleets plunder the natural marine resources of the islands, and the multinationals increasingly move in to exploit mineral and other wealth.

The islanders remain exploited, no matter the neo-colonial independence they have in large part been given. Workers receive minimal salaries; villagers are alienated from their traditional land by the colonial planters and by new multinational ventures; their former cultural values are being eroded by the massive tourist invasion and the take-away culture of American imperialism; their politicians are corrupted by capitalist ethics and begin capitalist accumulation, by fair means or foul.

The island nations of the South Pacific are uniformly small in population: Fiji is the largest with 600,000; Vanuaku (New Hebrides) has 100,000; New Caledonia 150,000, while other mini-states such as Nauru and Nuie have populations of only a few thousand. The level of capitalist penetration in the economy varies greatly. In Fiji, sugar plantations cover great areas of the islands and are owned by multinational companies, particularly CSR, while tourism is a booming industry, again controlled by multinationals. In Vanuaku, 36 per cent of all land is owned by Europeans, adding up to something like 50 per cent of arable land. In New Caledonia, the proportion of land alienated is even greater — the situation of the Kanaks is closer to that of the Australian Blacks than anything else.

Yet in the Gilbert Islands, for example, land alienation is minimal. Exploitation takes the form of grabbing the islanders for work on overseas shipping lines, often those registered in Panama or Liberia. Throughout the South Pacific, there is a rapidly increasing presence of Japanese fishing companies and woodchipping concerns. American agrobusiness is also moving in, while the British and French maintain traditional interests in copra and oil palm plantations. Nevertheless, it is Australian and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand capital which is dominant, though under challenge, in the islands. Trade is generally with Australia and New Zealand, providing a valuable outlet for their food products.

British, Australian and New Zealand imperialists, after the collapse of the British Empire in Asia and Africa, began a process of handing over formal independence to neo-colonial regimes in the islands, seen as a preventive measure against the growth of nationalist political parties and to build up a neo-colonial, compradore elite to ensure political stability for the multinationals. In Fiji, economically the most important of the former British colonies, the British made sure that communal differences between the Indian and Fijian population would remain a fall-back for imperialism in case of a general radicalisation. In this, they followed their divide-and-rule policy applied in Malaysia. Generally speaking, the Anglo-Saxon imperialists have been successful in their smooth transition to a neo-colonial independence in the South Pacific.

Lack of nationalist political parties opposed to neo-colonialism has led to the embryonic trade unions or, in some cases, the co-operative movement, directing the discontent of workers and villagers with the increased exploitation they suffer from multinationals and their local elites. In Fiji, the trade union movement has been the major force and there have been many strikes. But even here the trade union movement has been too often the vehicle for political promotion for its leaders although they are in opposition. In Papua New Guinea, similarly, the trade union movement in Port Moresby and Lae were vehicles for Pangu politicians such as Maori Kiki to win seats. Once in power, they set about...
containing the trade union movement to their government’s policies.

While trade unions can and do express discontent and provide a class alternative, they cannot be the real alternative, or rather, the basis for building an anti-imperialist party unless they become truly independent, adopt a clear political program, and sponsor the formation of a real workers’ and villagers’ party which is not simply a vehicle for the political ambitions of some union leaders. Such a party cannot, of course, only be narrowly concerned with the interests of union members but must also develop an alternative political program for the country, linking closely with the aspirations of the rural population, tackling the role of the multinationals and planters, and generally opening up an anti-capitalist road of development.

Among the newly-emerging intellectuals in these countries, those who are radical as students too often lose their radicalism once they leave universities and win jobs in the bureaucracy, beginning also on the road of capital accumulation, by fair means or foul. There is often little between a job with the government or multinationals and surviving at the level of the villager working his or her garden. But the main difficulty is a clear-cut political analysis, and a lack of marxist consciousness among these intellectuals, who are generally trained in universities in Port Moresby, Suva, Australia or New Zealand, where a “marxist culture” is notably lacking. Moreover, their isolation from Africa and Asia prevents a real study of the liberation movements in these countries which have, by and large, adopted marxism as the only real way forward.

The claim of “exceptionalism” for the South Pacific is tailor-made for the multinationals and for imperialism in general. But the islands of the South Pacific are not paradises where the laws of historical development do not apply. The multinationals are the same in Fiji or Kenya. Imperialism is the same in Iran or New Caledonia. Corrupt politicians are the same in Jakarta or Port Moresby. French legionnaires are the same in Senegal or Tahiti ....

Imperialism is a world system of exploitation and only its means of exploitation differ from place to place—from direct colonialism as in New Caledonia to military-fascism as in Jakarta or Chile, to neo-colonial regimes in Fiji or Kenya.

Similarly, the response to imperialism in the Third World is, of necessity, uniform. The questions are the same: do the peoples of the Third World follow a neo-colonial road, with the local elites depending on the crumbs from the table of the multinationals while the masses get only super-exploitation; or do they begin on a “non-capitalist road” which stops further multinational penetration and begins to take over the existing multinationals? Do they alienate further land for tourist complexes or for multinational agrobusinesses and mining, or do they take over the land already expropriated by planters and multinationals and return it to the people? Do they encourage massive urbanisation with bloated shanty towns, or concentrate on rural development, as a means of capitalising well-considered industrial growth?

Of course, there are specific characteristics of the South Pacific nations which must be considered and of course there are specific features of the total situation in each island-
nation which must be considered. These specific features will determine the specific characteristics any transition to socialism in these countries will have; they will provide aids or obstacles to defeating imperialism, and therefore it is extremely important that they be studied and integrated in an overall strategy for socialism in these countries.

However, before looking specifically at the situation in Vanuaaku, as an example of trying to understand the process in at least one South Pacific nation, we need to examine the specific role of French imperialism in the South Pacific.

**French imperialism in the South Pacific**

French imperialism, unlike British imperialism, has not surrendered its direct colonial rule in the South Pacific. On the contrary, it has many times expressed its determination that it is in the South Pacific as a direct colonial power "to stay". The immediate reasons are obvious: in Tahiti it still maintains its nuclear testing sites, while in New Caledonia there is a large French population (some 45 per cent of the total) and some of the richest nickel mines in the world.

French determination to stay, by outright use of military force if necessary, as the direct colonial power in the South Pacific, adds an explosive element to the political scene.

French imperialism has never gracefully and as a "preventive measure" handed over to a neo-colonial regime, with the exception of its French African empire. The decision to give independence to its African colonies was dictated by specific circumstances following the defeat in Algeria and the upsurge of the colonial revolution throughout the continent. But since, including in the Comores islands off the coast of East Africa, the French have given way only under pressure, and sought to right the situation by use of force soon after.

Another feature of French colonies is that, among the students from these countries who study in French universities, there is generally a strong element who absorb the "marxist culture" which is prevalent not only in the universities but also in French political life as a whole. Of course, these marxist intellectuals are generally a minority and many are also absorbed into
the neo-colonial bureaucracy after graduating. But it is a feature of French imperialism's specific difficulties which always makes a smooth and safe transition to neo-colonial rule a more difficult proposition than it has been for British imperialism.

**Vanuaaku — neo-colonialism or an anti-capitalist path?**

Vanuaaku will be the first country in the South Pacific to become independent. There has been a real struggle, over a period of eight years, for independence. In other countries, independence has been handed over without a struggle (if we except some elements of struggle in Papua New Guinea before Peacock took Somare under his wing).

Vanuaaku has many specific elements in its socio-economic situation: first, a relatively high degree of land alienation, but a small European population and the strong maintenance of traditional customs and land-ownership. Second, it is a joint colony — an Anglo-French Condominium or “Pandemonium”, as some wits accurately describe the bureaucratic chaos resulting from two sets of Colonel Blimps wrangling over who took precedence. But this has also had the effect of introducing a divisive element among Vanuaakuans which has given some possibility for the colonial powers to apply their time-honored policy of divide-and-rule. On the other hand, the contradictions between the colonial powers has offered the possibility of an intelligent policy of “divide-and-rule” by the nationalist movement!

The National Party which later became the Vanuaaku Pati began in 1971 and set 1977 as the deadline for independence. Very soon it understood that the land alienation by the planters and colonial companies was something linked integrally with independence: that independence could only have meaning if the land was returned to the people. As plantations are the main economic stake colonialism has in the country (along with the big Japanese fishing company and the tourist industry), the demand for the return of the land to the people added a radical, anti-capitalist aspect to the independence struggle.

It also led to the grassroots organisation which is such a strong aspect of the Vanuaaku Pati. The struggle for independence and land became not only a generalised slogan through which voters could be mobilised, but a source of organisation in which, increasingly, the demand for land and independence was something which was acted on in the villages, and the pressure on, and later occupation of, plantations became a key aspect of the struggle.

The Vanuaaku Pati is unique in that it is not an electoral party. It applies, above all, a policy of mass struggle. It is also an extremely democratic party. Few parties in the world hold two Congresses a year (or even more); hold meetings of political commissars from all islands and districts a couple of times a year. It is also closely governed by its membership in the villages and towns.

The extremely democratic organisation of the Vanuaaku Pati flows from a highly creative development of the strong traditional communal customs in the villages and a recognition of the
independence of the people, being further developed by the Pati. In fact, the villages have been in the majority "self-ruled" by the people through their traditional institutions. The divided colonial administration has left the villages largely alone, particularly in outlying islands. Traditionally, police only enter villages when called upon by the chiefs to solve a serious problem which they cannot. However, the vast majority of problems and disputes are solved within the traditional structures. National independence seemed a logical extension of the independence of the villages. Thus, in the crisis at the end of 1977, it was easy for the People’s Provisional Government to become a reality: the villages simply declared support and, in a sort of a way, their own “independence”. Thus “visas” or passes were needed to travel through Vanuaaku villages, and those colonial officials or their puppets who tried to enter villages were sent packing. The colonial authorities were then faced with having to risk an explosion by using police or French gendarmes to break the villages’ “independence” in a situation where this “independence” appeared to the people only a logical extension of a situation which had largely existed in practice for many decades.

Similarly, for many years the same principle of the de facto “independence” of the villages has radicalised the Presbyterian and Anglican Churches which together have the big majority of the population.

In the South Pacific, the churches have been colonial instruments of ideological oppression. In places like Tonga and Fiji they remain in that role. However, in Vanuaaku the two churches mentioned have been transformed and, in turn, have helped transform the political situation. The Presbyterian Church has a democratic tradition, but usually this has not meant it has become political, or necessarily identified with the earthly needs of the people. However, in Vanuaaku, the majority Presbyterian Church, through its pastors and lay persons from the villages, became “nationalised” and played a political role strongly supporting independence, land struggles, and the strengthening of “custom” and the democratic traditions of the villages. The President of the Vanuaaku Pati is an Anglican priest, Walter Lini, and its vice-president a leading pastor in the Presbyterian Church. But the Vanuaaku Pati is not a “church party”. It is a nationalist party in which the different strands of the “theology of liberation”, a secular nationalism, traditional “custom” and a radical anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism are uniquely mixed, arising from the society in which it exists and, above all, from the highly democratic methods under which the party operates.

This can be seen in the villages themselves where decisions are taken by the interplay of all these factors: the pastor, the chief, the Vanuaaku Pati secretary, the co-operative chairperson and, lately, the Youth Association and Vanuaaku Women secretaries, together with democratic consultation with all sectors of the population. Problem-solving, decisions on action, are made not by any one of these forces within the village, but by consultation among all of them (and in any case, the different “strands” are often combined among them in one or more individuals). Thus a tremendous unity of will and action is built up and because there is a constant series of conferences, of visits from leaders and to headquarters in Vila, there emerges a nationwide unity, even down to a thorough understanding of tactics developed in a rapidly changing situation. Of course, this process is helped by the smallness of the total population as well as by traditional decision-making processes which the Vanuaaku Pati has adopted and developed in an extraordinarily creative way. The result is an enormously powerful political “machine”, and very creative tactics combined with principled strategy and goals.

This was best illustrated in the period of the People’s Provisional Government. In November 1977, the Vanuaaku Pati boycotted the elections because of the undemocratic electoral system and the powerlessness of the Assembly. As a result there were no elections — the many small puppet parties arranged it so there was only a single candidate for each seat and they were then declared elected. So the Vanuaaku Pati decided to form a “People’s Provisional Government”. This government issues visas or passes, and villages decided that no one without a pass could enter their traditional areas. At the same time, PPG supporters refused to pay taxes or vehicle licences to the puppet Assembly, paying them to the PPG instead. Villagers were given the green light
to occupy plantations situated on their traditional land. The decision to set up the PPG was taken only after exhaustive discussion at a Vanuaaku Pati Congress.

I will give an example of the occupation of a big French-owned plantation in Malekula island. The plantation, with over 1,000 head of cattle and thousands of coconut trees, was on traditional land and had been claimed by the villagers for many years. After the PPG was formed, the villagers served notice on the manager to get out. He refused, and so a "guerrilla campaign" began: roads on the plantation were dug up or barricaded one by one until he could not drive out. Then some household pets mysteriously died. Eventually, the manager decided to get out, so French police came in, arrested six of the "ringleaders" and took out the manager. But the arrests did not stop the action because there were no "ringleaders" — every step of the action had been decided after collective and exhaustive debate. When those arrested were jailed, the villagers served notice on the big French trading company, CFNH, to come by a certain date and remove all its property (worth $150,000) from its big store on the plantation. When the company did not meet the deadline, the villagers marched to the store and sat down outside it. A pastor said a prayer and then the doors were forced open. In a very serious atmosphere, the name of each head of household was called out in order — the first thing to be distributed was the rice — a bag of rice each, until it was all distributed. Then came the sugar, other food and finally several small boats. By the end of the day the entire property of the CFNH had been "redistributed". Another prayer, and then an orderly march back to their villages.

The result has been that French plantation and store owners have had to accept the reality: the only alternative would be massive repression and the arrest of all involved. The CFNH has accepted the reality — it has asked if it could, please, still act as the shipping company, bringing their ships to buy the copra from their ex-plantation for sale.

Vanuaaku Pati headquarters were only informed after the event (following the green light given by the Congress for such occupations). The villagers saw nothing ironic or amusing in this orderly expropriation of a big French company. Rather it was a very serious, historic moment for them: it marked the return of their land, and the repayment, by the redistribution of the company's stores, for their stolen land and labor over decades.

Today, the plantation is run under a system which can only be described as "self-management". First, the workers on the plantation, who mainly came from other islands, have been integrated and "adopted" by the different villages. An elected committee manages the plantation. Any villager or ex-worker can go and prepare copra from the trees on the plantation. They then "sell it" to the collective management for the price paid for it at the plantation dock by the trading company, less $1 a bag which goes into the collective's bank account. As a result, workers and villagers receive more than double the wages they received before — if my memory is correct, it is, in fact, four times the previous amount per bag. Second, productivity has, not surprisingly, risen greatly. Concerning cattle, they are sold to individual villagers at a much cheaper price than previously, but a limit is placed on the number to be killed. Maintenance work on the plantation is done by villagers and ex-workers and salaries are paid by the collective. The standard of living of all concerned has risen dramatically, while the surplus available has meant that the local clinic has now been taken over by the villagers and is paid for by them.

Arising from this experience there are some very important lessons for the future. In Papua New Guinea and other places, when plantations have been bought and handed over to local traditional owners, the aim of the colonial-sponsored land law has been to develop a rich peasantry, with individual lots, or to turn the traditional owners into a company — the workers remaining workers, with the same wages and conditions as before, the profit returning in small part only to the villagers, also being available for loans, etc. to allow the setting up of a small bourgeoisie. The aim of this neo-colonial strategy is to satisfy the planters who sell at favorable rates, to give the semblance of ownership by traditional owners but, in fact, to favor the development of capitalism in the countryside as a social base for the neo-colonial regime and the serious exploitation of other resources by the multinationals.
Vanuaaku Pati strategy is radically different. So far, plantations taken over have been run collectively. They have not been divided into individual holdings, which also has the advantage of maintaining the more economically viable large units. The profits must be won by labor if they are to go to individuals or families, and the total profits of the plantation are invested collectively, on democratically decided projects, allowing substantial economic development of the villages concerned, and the take-over and self-management of formerly centralised functions such as clinics, etc. When Vanuaaku becomes independent, no doubt through democratic decision, there would have to be a tax on the self-managed plantations to help those villages who have no such enterprises on their land.

This system has not been developed through an “ideological” choice of the Vanuaaku Pati or the villagers. I doubt if anyone has heard of the concept of self-management. It developed from the very real traditions of the villagers themselves, of collective labor, of the democratic processes evolved by the Vanuaaku Pati, and the desire to maintain and develop these traditions. Certainly, some VP leaders know what it means to have capitalism consciously introduced into the countryside, but their concern only supplements the deep feeling of the villagers on these questions. Through a largely spontaneous movement, we have self-management existing as the mode of social relations in these occupied plantations. It is a fact which can provide the basis for a genuinely non-capitalist road in Vanuaaku, going towards the construction of a genuine democratic and socialist society, rooted in the deeply-held traditional customs of the people.

Of course, a plantation here or there is not the country as a whole. There are many, many obstacles and dangers to overcome and, of course, imperialism is not inactive in seeking a way to try to tame the Vanuaaku Pati and implant a neo-colonial solution on the country. If they fail, they will use their final weapon — outright military intervention, or use of mercenaries as occurred last year in the Comores. For the moment, however, they are seeking to tame the Vanuaaku Pati which has now entered into a “caretaker government” with 50 per cent of the posts, until elections this year as a lead up to independence.

After the experience of the People’s Provisional Government, the colonial authorities were forced to make concessions. They agreed to almost all the demands of the VP for truly democratic elections, and finally agreed to the “caretaker government” with the VP having half the posts. The period since last April, when the PPG was suspended, has seen the VP win many of the supporters of the former puppet parties, the increasing division among these puppet parties, and the clear sign that the overwhelming majority of the people — I would estimate 75 per cent — now support the VP or splits from other parties which back it.

The colonial powers now realise that the Vanuaaku Pati would win any election and that only three or four electorates would return puppets. Thus they must speed up the introduction of the VP into the Cabinet, give them responsibilities, attempt to surround them with colonial advisers who will show them the “realism” of a neo-colonial solution and thus try to split the VP, or tame it to a neo-colonial outfit, a la PANGU. The next two years will see heavy pressure in an attempt to reach such a result.

Of course, there is no certainty that the Vanuaaku Pati will be able to resist this pressure for a neo-colonial solution. The main guarantee is that the VP is not an electoral outfit, nor is it simply there as a means of promoting leaders to Cabinet posts. It is a mass party in which the masses have real control. It is therefore essential that the Vanuaaku Pati exists independently, with a strong leadership, separate from the government, even when the government becomes a fully Vanuaaku Pati one.

Perspectives

The separation of the party from the state is an extremely important one for those who want a democratic, self-managed socialist society. If the two are the same, then the way is open for a neo-colonial solution or a stalinist-type dictatorship.

Concretely, in Vanuaaku, the danger is that, after winning power and then independence, the Vanuaaku Pati will become simply a support for the government, that the real decisions will be taken in the Cabinet with the public service bureaucracy,
and that the democratic decision-making structure of the Pati, developed over the past eight years, will be forgotten. This would make it very easy for a neo-colonial solution to develop, particularly if all the main leaders of the Pati were to become ministers, and the Pati leadership second rank figures, carrying out orders from the government, with the Pati mobilised only at election time.

Dangers also remain strong if, for the period after independence, all legislative power rests with the National Assembly, elected only every few years, and with full-time parliamentarians drawing big salaries and leading a comfortable life in Vila where they would be tempted to begin capital accumulation and, inevitably, fall into the trap of corruption.

Rather, the logical extension of the democratic decision-making of the VP is to transform the legislative bodies into true organs of popular democracy. That does not mean the "popular democracy" which elsewhere assumes that name, but a pattern based on the regular VP congresses and Political Commissars' meetings where decisions are made by regular meetings of representatives from the villages; after thorough pre-discussion; with post-Congress discussion; with thoroughly democratic debate carried out in a way accessible to the delegates and, above all, with the right to change delegates from one meeting to another should a delegate not vote in a way suitable to the opinions of the village(s) represented. Vanuaaku is fortunate in having a small population in which such a form of direct democracy can be applied. Similarly, village, district and island government could and should follow the same pattern. The bad example of "Provincial Government" in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere "decentralisation" has meant the establishment of many mini-parliaments, complete with their quotas of paid parliamentarians, bureaucracies and corruption should be avoided.

The policy of direct democracy is also economic, as it implies that, at best, delegates should only receive travelling expenses and any other out-of-pocket costs incurred in their cuties — no high salaries, no privileges, no attendant bureaucrats and no corruption. To maintain the institutions of western parliamentary democracy in such a small country is to automatically favor the development of an elite whose aim in life becomes capital accumulation and the Good Life in the Bright Lights. In countries such as Vanuaaku, the state and parliamentary forms become the prime means of developing a local capitalist class. There are many, many examples of that.

Of course, the system of direct democracy for legislative decisions has problems, particularly if laws are drafted in incomprehensible legal terminology. But this can be overcome. Such direct democracy does not exclude the need for the Vanuaaku Pati continuing to operate in a parallel pattern. Village or district representatives to the legislative congresses will also come from non-Vanuaaku Pati areas and to isolate colonial manoeuvres it is important not to impose bans on other parties unless they physically take up arms against the democratically elected government. Such bans against opposition parties, even those which back the planters, would negate the grassroots democracy that the Vanuaaku Pati has practised in the past. Therefore, the Vanuaaku Pati must act as a Pati, continue its democratic decision-making and be in a position where it can debate broader issues of strategy and long-term goals outside the narrower confines of passing laws.

So, immediately, we see a danger in the contradiction between the direct democracy in the Vanuaaku Pati, and the parliamentary forms they will have to live with at least until some time after independence.

But there are others which will determine whether Vanuaaku follows a neo-colonial path. Foremost is the attitude to proposals by multinationals for new developments in the fields of tourism, fishing, wood-chipping and so on, and of guarantees which the colonial powers will undoubtedly seek for the future, of multinational or overseas investment at present in the country.

In the transition period to independence, we can expect multinationals to try to stake their claims as soon as possible, while the colonial powers are able to exercise the maximum pressure. How the VP responds will be an important pointer. Similarly, the question of plantations claimed by villagers will also be a question for negotiation: for example, the way in which planters will be
compensated — by the colonial governments or by the Vanuaaku government? Also relevant is the speed with which the hand-over or take-over of the plantations will proceed. The colonial authorities will seek to have decisions made on these questions before independence, whereas it is realistic to say that such decisions can only justly be taken by an independent nation, not one still under colonial tutelage. However, it cannot be excluded that compromises of one sort or another may be made to ease the way to independence. The scope and nature of such compromises will, however, be crucial, as will the way in which they are decided upon.

Of longer term, certainly after independence, is the question of the future of major multinational and big business investment in the country: the plantations as a whole, of course, but also the big Japanese fishing company, the tourist hotels, the small BHP manganese mines, the BP and French trading companies and so on.

Of course, these are difficult political and economic questions, and possibly different approaches will be taken to them at different speeds and with different solutions. The plantations are, of course, the burning question.

For the future, the real question is how can an independent Vanuaaku develop economically without becoming a playground for the multinationals, without the destruction of its culture, without a massive influx into the towns and without the expropriation of much of the nation’s wealth by a new elite emerging from those in power after independence?

Problems of development

The first question is: what kind of development? For example, there is currently a proposal for a large casino in Vila. There is a proposal by a Japanese company to begin woodchipping on Malekula. There are proposals for a rash of new hotels to accommodate a major tourist boom. This is the “development” being proposed by the multinationals who argue that it will provide jobs for Vanuaakuans. No doubt there will be a few jobs — as servants in the tourist expansion and casinos, and as laborers in the woodchipping industry. No doubt also there will be some foreign exchange won. But at what cost?

In large countries, with strong political systems and a stable society already industrialised (I think here of Yugoslavia or Romania, for example) a massive tourist industry can be absorbed without destroying the culture and, generally, can be a reasonable economic development. However, in small countries struggling to overcome the legacy of colonialism and the threat of neo-colonialism, to strongly establish their own culture and stable independent political life, massive tourism can be a disaster — as can be seen in Fiji. So far, in Vanuaaku, there are two large international hotels and a dozen smaller ones, tourism has been contained and does not yet pose a critical problem. But the last thing one would wish on Vanuaakuans is that they become a nation of servants, pandering to the whims of Australian and Japanese tourists. Moreover, the nature of tourism in countries such as Vanuaaku is that it is controlled by multinationals, the costs are paid in the home countries, even much of the food is imported directly, and very little really remains in the country. A massive new tourist explosion would have very bad consequences for Vanuaaku.

Similarly, wood-chipping would destroy the heritage of the people — the inland forests in which their forefathers lived, a natural wealth in its own right that no one has the right to destroy now for the goal of a bit more foreign exchange and a few jobs.

There is no mad rush to endorse, or embark on, schemes proposed by the multinationals and others. That applies to “development” in general. The same democratic procedures that apply within the Vanuaaku Pati should also apply to all development — it is necessary to clearly fix priorities, to discuss all sides (and not only the “advice” of the colonial “experts” or those brought out by the multinationals). In general, it is necessary to develop a plan for development, stretching over a long period, aimed at co-ordinated and clear-cut goals.

How can such a plan be developed? Traditionally, under neo-colonialism when such plans are even considered, they are drawn up by “expert” bureaucrats at the top and then announced with a flourish to the people. There is another alternative:
planning should begin from the villages and then proceed up, for consolidation and elaboration, to be then transmitted to the base again.

That could mean, for example, that villages, singly, or in groups, draw up “Cahiers” or lists of projects and needs for their villages which they would like included within a national plan. Before and during such discussions on village plans, a nationwide discussion should begin on priorities, goals and different major national projects. The villages could also be encouraged to try to find their own resources — financial, material and human — the solutions and the means to build their own projects, limiting the need to call in central government finances and aid. At the same time, they should have available technical advice from the centre to help them plan.

Thus, village by village, island by island, a clear picture of the hopes, needs and priorities of the people will be built up, where they will decide what they want to do for “development” in their areas in the following five or so years. Of course, new ideas will come when they examine the draft plans of other villages and islands — an intensive interchange of ideas can take place, leading to modifications and changes.

These plans would not, of course, only cover strictly economic projects but also health, education, culture and so on. Discussion would then have to take place on a national level, considering particularly the requests from different villages and islands for central government aid in fulfilling their own plans, as well as major national projects, priorities and funding.

One major advantage of such planning is that everyone down to the simplest villager is drawn into the planning process and has an awareness and commitment to carrying out the plan. Moreover, the stress should be on the villagers doing as much as possible with their own resources, and not relying passively on centralised funding. This in turn encourages collective saving and use of capital, rather than its diversion into individual capitalist enterprises. It will help end the divorce between the central government and the villagers. And it is something that fits perfectly with the traditional pattern of village life and decision-making.

“Development” and “planning” have been mystified by the “experts”, and by colonialism, into things divorced from ordinary mortals, whose allotted task is to pay for them and carry them out, but not to understand them. In fact, it is mystification for the explicit purpose of allowing the multinationals and colonial “experts” to make the decisions for their own profit. When there is a process of democratic planning, from the villages up, the mystification disappears.

It is within such a finally democratically decided national plan that a role for foreign aid and investment can be worked out and, as we said before, there is no rush to agree to their plans.

Guidance and technical advice will be needed, of course, at all levels of the democratic planning process. For example, there would be danger of village plans being essentially for social welfare projects — it must be pointed out that it is necessary to also expand economic production, to in part fund these projects. It then requires technical advice on suitable crops, the situation in international markets and so on. This would also apply even more on major national projects.

I hope this outlines conceptions I have of how it will be possible for Vanuaaku to develop: by the very nature of such planning, the emphasis would be overwhelmingly on the development of the rural areas where the vast majority of the people live. In any case, I believe this is the only real basis for development and eventual industrialisation. Vanuaaku’s wealth is its rich soil and natural resources and, above all, its people. It is upon these natural and human resources and not upon foreign aid and investment that the national essentially will develop. Any outside aid can only have a role if carefully slotted into the mobilisation of the people.

Finally, I want to highlight the very real threat that imperialism, and particularly French imperialism, will use military force to try to stop any such non-capitalist road of development. But it is the mobilisation of the people that is the main guarantee that such force will fail. Already the Vanuaaku Pati has supported the formation of self-defence units in the villages.
New Caledonia — Armed Struggle?

In New Caledonia the struggle is much more difficult. Not only are the French imperialists unwilling to leave this nickel-rich colony, but they have also introduced a relatively large settler population.

It is ironic that among the first French colons there were convicts deported after the Paris Commune. Unfortunately, they and their descendants quickly became as racist as any settlers in South Africa or Australia. The Kanak people were robbed of their land and the colons settled the west coast particularly, turning it into a little bit of France, so well advertised on tourist brochures today. Of course, included in the 50,000-odd French nationals in New Caledonia today is a good percentage of expatriate civil servants, teachers and — military. They nevertheless have full voting rights in the powerless Territorial Assembly.

This heavy colonisation has resulted in a much greater loss of culture among the Kanaks than has taken place in Vanuaaku. Deculturisation among the Kanaks has led to many of the problems, particularly in the urban areas, which exist among Australian Blacks. Moreover, there has arisen an Uncle Tom “reformist” elite who politically, and in other ways, mislead the Kanaks into accepting the colonial situation. The French administration and the big nickel company follow a policy of “carrot and stick” to hinder the rise of the newly-emerging Kanak independence movement.

Nevertheless, the Kanak independence movements of PALIKA and FULK have made steady progress, particularly in the Kanak reserves of the East Coast of the “Grand Terre” (main island) and in particular in the Loyalty Islands where land alienation is minimal. The PALIKA is also having an increasing impact among the dispossessed Kanak youth in Noumea and other urban centres. The beginnings of a grassroots based movement, centred in the reserves, is also emerging, although unfortunately there is still a long way to go to match the grassroots strength and organisation of the Vanuaaku Pati.

There can be no doubt that the struggle for independence in New Caledonia is going to be the most difficult in the South Pacific. The Kanaks can therefore rightly ask, and expect, the total solidarity of the independent nations of the region. In one sense, New Caledonia is the South Africa of the South Pacific — and it is correct to demand that all governments — even the most servilely neo-colonial ones in the region — unite to support the Kanaks and kick the French imperialists out of their country.

Largely through the initiative of the Vanuaaku Pati, a Kanak leader spoke at the United Nations and made an extended visit through Africa, winning the first international support for Kanak independence. Of course, the first priority must be to win bigger Kanak support for independence, but that can also be greatly helped if there is a mobilisation of the already independent nations of the South Pacific for their support. Papua New Guinea and Fiji have recently made strong statements for New Caledonian independence, while the Vanuaaku Pati has assured the Kanaks that it will never desert their just struggle no matter how much pressure they face from France. The VP has, in a very principled way, said that Vanuaaku can never be truly independent until New Caledonia is also truly independent. That is a very real statement as New Caledonia will be the launching pad for any imperialist intervention in Vanuaaku.

As for armed struggle, it is very difficult to see how this could be successfully launched, given the small population, the small land area and the strength of the French military presence. But it cannot, of course, be excluded, at a later stage.

The intransigence of French imperialism in the South Pacific adds an explosive element to the total situation. It could be the basis for the radicalisation of the present South Pacific institutions which are still dominated by the old colonial powers (including Australia and New Zealand) and lead to the formation of a new organisation on the style of the Organisation of African Unity, with a very special focus on forcing French imperialism out of New Caledonia and Tahiti, and excluding the French, British, American, Australian and New Zealand governments. Indeed the formation of such an organisation is a very necessary step towards the collective and individual independence of the South Pacific nations.
The present institutions are dominated by imperialist powers, despite some straining for a bigger role by PNG and Fiji, and also Western Samoa.

From this arises another question: is it viable to have so many mini-states, each existing alone, rather than try to build a South Pacific Federation in which each state would maintain its independence, but in which unity could be gradually built, first from a common political struggle to rid the Pacific of direct colonialism, then to fight for economic co-operation, co-ordinate pressure and demands on the dominant neo-colonial powers, and so on?

An OAU-style organisation, pledged to fight colonialism in the region, and to build unity, would enable the South Pacific nations as a whole to take a much more active role in world affairs, to seek genuine independence at least at a diplomatic level, and to seek to establish links with the African nations in particular, whose struggles and situation have some important similarities (for example, the OAU struggle against racism in southern Africa has its parallels with the struggle against French colonialism in New Caledonia and Tahiti).

Such an OAU-style organisation is not the end-all of the struggle. Imperialism and neo-colonialism remain and will remain implanted, as they are in the majority of the African members of the OAU. The anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist forces will also have to seek their own form of unity in the region.

But an OAU-style organisation would also provide protection for nations such as Vanuaaku which will undoubtedly be in the vanguard of the struggle against French imperialism in the South Pacific. That is not a minor consideration.

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official forces the reluctant and bewildered bailiff to take the more-or-less unresisting doctor to an unstaffed jail and court. No one, except the bailiff, finds these proceedings peculiar. After the doctor is taken away, Harker orders that the room where the Count was killed and Lucy’s body lies, be closed up, never to be opened. For the first time since his return from the Carpathians, he smiles; we see his fangs; the Count is dead, long live the Count! In the final scene, Harker whips his horse across the shoreline where he previously walked with his loving wife, galloping into the middle distance, the vampire abroad again.

Herzog’s political message would appear to be that sacrifices to stave off external threats are useless. The threat does not come from outside, but is nurtured and nursed within our domestic walls.

The bureaucracy, relying on authoritarianism and bluff, is content to incarcerate the righteous avengers (shades of Baader-Meinhof?) and to ignore the desperate and despairing nature of social reality. In circumstances of bourgeois complacency, and in the absence of any sense of community or of the danger about to overtake society, is it any wonder that the menace, aided by a foolish, officious bureaucracy, can re-establish itself?

Herzog’s political vision is bleak. His film, opening with mumified cadavers silently screaming their pain and closing with the new Dracula losing himself anew upon the world is more manifestly horrific than any horror movie.

— Kathe Boehringer.