

Tahiti Heats Up

Anarchist Federation

1995

THE FRENCH STATE'S decision to continue with its underground nuclear tests at the Mururoa atoll ignited a huge powder-keg throughout Oceania, the chains of small islands, many of which are still ruled by France.

In New Zealand and Australia, the actions were met by large "mobilisations". The establishment politicians were able to hi-jack these genuine expressions of anger for their own nationalist agendas, to strengthen their own regional interest in the Pacific against their rival France.

This was reflected in the nationalist rhetoric employed by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Britain, who instead of seeing the culprit as the French State and militarists, launched a chauvinistic "anti-Frog" campaign. The French as a people, despite massive mobilisations and general opposition to the tests, were made culpable.

The widespread rioting in Tahiti was not just anger against the tests. It was also the result of simmering resentment against the French colonialists, the 25 per cent unemployment, the widespread alienation. The traditional way of life of Tahitians, involving a communal use of the land, was undermined when the French introduced wage labour, primarily through the nuclear industry which was established 29 years ago. The insurrection in Tahiti is a result of integration into the global economy, through the medium of French imperialism. Of course the French military and economic pressure should be removed, but not for the benefit of national liberation politicians ready to establish "independent" states.

Many of those involved in the confrontation were unemployed youth, who make up a large part of the population. They were forced to live in wretched conditions in shanty towns close to Papeete airport. The bulk of land is owned by colonists, forcing many families who farm the land to send some of their members to seek work in the towns, work which is scarce and badly paid. The uprising was spontaneous, involving the creative use of bull-dozers to storm the airport and cut off reinforcements for the French police thugs. This was followed by looting of the duty-free shops in a welcome redistribution of wealth.

The leader of the nationalists, Oscar Temaru, called for an end to the uprising saying that, "I would like to do something...We are trying to calm the people, but it's not easy". His class interests mean that he is opposed to the resistance, to the destruction and redistribution of property, and needs to protect himself against allegations from the French state that he was the ring-leader of the uprising (which of course he wasn't).

The way forward is through a healthy cross-pollination between the best features of traditional society, (the communal land and decentralised decision making) and the concept of libertarian communism. We know that all the repressive techniques of the French militarists, including murder and torture, tried and tested in Indo-China and Algeria, will be used to crush the Tahitian resistance. But we also know that the revolt is now widely supported by the Tahitian masses. Organise! salutes the heroic Tahitians, workers and unemployed, who took on the might of the French State.

Greenpeace was keen to keep the protest against the test within “non-violent” limits. They re-affirmed that the way to stop the test was only through a devotion to non-violence just a day before the Papeete insurrection! This was because of a number of attacks on French embassies and businesses. No support for the actions of the masses in Tahiti was forthcoming from Greenpeace. To do this would mean upsetting the wealthy benefactors of Greenpeace which gets more than \$100 million dollars a year in donations. Greenpeace is a highly hierarchical structure, which relies on passivity by its supporters. Actions are carried out by small groups of Greenpeace activists on behalf of its supporters. Little effort is made to involve these on an active basis. If the activists fall out of line, as happened recently with the capture of several key Greenpeace naval craft by French military, they are disciplined in typical command structure style.

No attempt was made by Greenpeace to form links with environmental action groups in Polynesia. As one local activist remarked “Greenpeace come with their own agenda. They were not particularly interested in us.” But then Greenpeace is not particularly interested in developing environmental action on a local and regional level, still less in linking destruction of the planet and the species that live on it to the root cause: capitalism itself.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Anarchist Federation
Tahiti Heats Up
1995

Retrieved on May 13, 2013 from web.archive.org
Published in *Organise!* Issue 40 – Autumn 1995.

theanarchistlibrary.org