

Report from Paris by Yves Messer

Crisis for France in the South Pacific

The Soviets are stirring up "liberation" movements and the Socialist International to force France to withdraw.

The Soviet drive for domination of the Pacific is creating growing problems for France, which now confronts the prospect of a replay there of its retreat from Chad before the bayonets of Libya's Colonel Qaddafi.

The strategically located South Pacific is a key to Soviet world naval supremacy, and every separatist, terrorist, and anti-Western force in the region is now being stirred up to achieve the ouster of France, the United States, and other Western powers. Several recent developments underscore the fact that local tensions are being transformed into an open war against France and its allies.

This follows close on the heels of the Sept. 17 signing of an agreement between French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson and Libya's Ali Triki, to begin withdrawing troops from Chad. The accord is widely seen in Africa as a kind of "Munich Pact" betrayal. Said one West African diplomat: "How can we go to France with our security problems now that France is working with Qaddafi, who is trying to destabilize our country?" Not only is Chad now set up for destabilization and genocide; the Central African Republic and Sudan are also on the chopping block.

A comparable scenario is planned for the South Pacific, and it is no surprise to find Qaddafi and his friends in the Socialist International in the thick of it.

First is the problem of the Mururoa atoll in French Polynesia, the island where France has tested its nuclear ex-

plosives since 1966. A second series of tests has been scheduled to take place since the beginning of this year, but protests on many levels are holding up the program.

In Noumea, New Caledonia (a large French island in the Coral Sea, 800 nautical miles east of Australia), a terrorist liberation front was created in September, gathering various "kanak" groupings ("kanaks" are native New Caledonians). This occurred at a congress where the former Independence Front (FI) was replaced by the National Kanak Socialist Liberation Front (FLNKS), led by Yan Celene Uregei, a friend of Qaddafi. At this congress, where the French Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist League of Alain Krivine and the U.S. Socialist Workers Party were also represented, the FLNKS gathered 10 terrorist groups and other "cultural" associations to demand the protection of their "kanak heritage" from the encroachments of Western "imperialism."

The conference announced that the new front would create a temporary government in Noumea, and would prepare for a general boycott of the next local elections scheduled for Nov. 18. The member groups reject even the idea of a referendum on New Caledonia independence, currently scheduled for 1989.

After the conference concluded, a 20-member FLNKS delegation led by Uregei flew to Libya to receive training there from Qaddafi's expert terror and assassination squads.

In the midst of all this came the

joint declaration of the Labour governments of Australia and New Zealand condemning the French nuclear tests on the Mururoa atoll, and proposing that the whole region be made into a demilitarized and nuclear-free zone. The Soviet Union, of course, was delighted.

In September, at the annual congress of New Zealand's Labour Party, Prime Minister David Lange delivered a twofold warning to French "imperialism": 1) At the next conference of the Socialist International, the New Zealand Labor Party will do everything within its power to kick out the French Socialist unless France stops its nuclear tests in the Pacific and accelerates the process of granting independence to its territories of Polynesia and New Caledonia. (Lange, quoting a recent investigation showing that the nuclear tests were safe, proposed ironically that France perform these tests in Strasbourg.) 2) The New Zealand government will put pressure on France to prevent France from shifting its nuclear test site from the Mururoa atoll to the Kerguelen and Croza islands (two small and empty archipelagoes in the southern Indian Ocean, near the Antarctic).

As for Australia, it has decided to stop uranium exports to France for the next two years, in protest against the French nuclear tests.

The Mitterrand government has no policy whatsoever to deal with these threats to its own national security and that of the Western alliance. Foreign Minister Cheysson could only respond to Lange's assault, according to a New Zealand newspaper, by assuring him that France was prepared to move up the timetable for granting independence to New Caledonia.

The French policy failure will only serve to hasten the withdrawal of the Western powers from the Pacific, as Moscow desires.