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THE SOVIET UNION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC*

George K. Tanham

The Soviet Ambassador to Australia, Dr. Evgeni Samoteikin, speaking at an Australian Defence Force Academy conference in Canberra in March 1987, spiritedly denied that Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, was a Soviet Union base. He maintained that it was not a base in the conventional meaning of the word, like the American base in Subic, Philippines.¹ The Soviet Union, he said, intended to increase its diplomatic and commercial presence in the South Pacific but, he emphasized, it will not have a military presence. Admiral Smirov, deputy commander in chief of the Soviet Pacific fleet, in a letter to the Melbourne, Australia, newspaper, the *Age*, argued that Cam Ranh Bay was only a temporary logistic support base. He stated further that the Soviet Union owned no land there and shared berths with the Vietnamese, who guarded the base.

In response to these statements, the U.S. Navy released to the public photographs that indeed showed Soviet activities at Cam Ranh Bay and signified its importance as a much needed warm-water naval operations base for Soviet vessels, as well as a well-located air base. Other information suggested that it was probably the third most important Sigint (signal intelligence) base outside the USSR and a vital communications link to Vladivostok. Furthermore, it could pose a threat to sea lanes vital to the free world, but that is not really the point.

* Review of this material does not imply Department of Defense endorsement of factual accuracy or opinion.

¹ The Soviets do not customarily build a large permanent infrastructure at their bases as the Americans do; instead, they use old ships and barges for logistical support facilities. So in a sense, the Soviet officials could make the point that the Soviet base was more "temporary" than the American bases in the Philippines.

The real point is that the Soviets do not wish to project a militaristic image in the South Pacific. They seek instead to appeal to the Pacific islanders' strong desire for peace and their anti-nuclear feelings. Although the Soviet Union openly engages in worldwide military rivalries with the United States, Mr. Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech and the other official statements typify the minimization of Russian military capabilities in keeping with their projection of a peaceful image in the South Pacific.

An ever present possibility is that Cam Ranh Bay and the Soviet Pacific military forces, though mostly in the North Pacific, could have political influence in the South Pacific. These forces are not being so used at the moment (late 1987). On the other hand, although the Soviets may try to ignore and downplay the importance of Cam Ranh Bay, they are not about to give it up.

While denying any military capabilities in the South Pacific, the Soviets continue to conduct certain low key camouflaged military activities there. It is believed that the Soviets are utilizing their fishing fleets wherever possible to gather important data and collect intelligence, initially in Kiribati, and now in Vanuatu. The fishing fleets have long had the capability for Sigint and collecting intelligence information. Specifically trained Soviet crewmen and special agents can collect intelligence, contact and work with local unions, and fraternize with the islanders. A recent unconfirmed report alleges that the Soviets' fishing agreement with Vanuatu allows them to deploy underwater acoustic monitoring devices capable of monitoring ships and submarines. Although this most likely refers to "fish-finding vessels," these ships could easily serve a dual purpose. The Soviets have the largest oceanographic fleet in the world, and since the early 1980s, their activities in the South Pacific have increased. The fleet collects valuable scientific data that are useful to navies. Detailed information on ocean floors, for example, could prove extremely useful for hiding submarines, and many have long believed that the Soviets would like to take advantage of the area's great ocean depths for this purpose. In summary, both fleets can monitor commercial vessels,

shipping lanes, and naval ships, as well as perform their declared functions.

SOVIET PEACEFUL ACTIVITIES

The Soviets talk considerably about their desire for commercial relations with the South Pacific nations. Although not necessarily financially profitable, the most successful penetration of the area so far has been through their fishing agreements. The Soviet pact with Kiribati was a breakthrough. It provided for fishing in Kiribati's exclusive economic zone but not within its sovereign 12-mile limit, nor were any shore or port facilities allowed. This pact was not renewed, ostensibly because the Soviets did not wish to pay Kiribati's price, and because, as Soviet officials told Babera Kirata, the Kiribati Minister of Natural Resources and Development, they had lost 20 million Australian dollars in the first year. In fact, the Soviet Union was at the same time negotiating with Vanuatu for a fishing agreement. Although Kiribati has better fishing than Vanuatu, the latter has better harbors and agreed to Soviet use of three ports and shore facilities. Vanuatu occupies a better strategic location than Kiribati, being closer to French New Caledonia and Australia. It is also surrounded by the deep waters so useful for hiding submarines. The pact was signed with Vanuatu in January 1987, despite their having lost \$20 million Australian in Kiribati where fishing is better.

As of this writing (November 1987), one Soviet fishing vessel put into a Vanuatu port in April, and its crew went ashore to sightsee. In August 1987, a fish locating vessel put into port, was visited by some ni-Vanuatu, and its crew allowed to come ashore. How much the crew mingled with the ni-Vanuatu has not been reported; however, in September, a young Vanuatu boy using the Culture Center Library in Port Vila had in his possession a Radio Moscow schedule. It announced a competition, the prize being a trip to Moscow, which the boy was most interested in winning. How he got the schedule is unclear, but the contest certainly attracted his attention to Moscow.

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The Soviets have also tried to develop trade with several South Pacific nations. In September 1986, two members of the Soviet Embassy in Australia visited Fiji to survey possible areas of USSR-Fiji economic cooperation. They were looking into possible joint-venture industrial projects and the bartering of Soviet products for Fiji commodities. The mission was apparently well received, and then Prime Minister Ratu Mara even lunched with them, an honor not usually given to low level officials from any country. The mission returned to Australia, apparently pleased with the results, but due to the political instability in Fiji, no further action has been taken.

The Soviet Union, possessor of the world's largest merchant marine, is eager to develop a South Pacific shipping business. A Polish line already operates in the area. In 1986, the Soviet Union offered aid to Papua New Guinea (PNG) and several other island states and is continuing its efforts to establish closer economic relations and trade with them. Some observers believe that in its trade agreements it will willingly accept an unfavorable balance of trade as the price of gaining good will in these small countries, because Soviet policy is to use any and all means to pursue political objectives.

That the Soviets have made progress is proved by recent events. In 1984, all Soviet aid, such as the offer of a university in West Samoa or a cannery in Papua New Guinea, was, almost without consideration, turned down. Today many of these nations are negotiating, or about to negotiate, with the Soviets.² The West is somewhat concerned that these poor countries, in their desperate effort to achieve economic independence and security, may seek aid and economic agreements with the Soviets, and find themselves in a political situation which they do not now envisage.

² The section on the Soviet Union in *Oceania, A Regional Study, 1984 Edition*, edited by Frederica M. Burge and Melinda W. Cooke, American University, Washington, D.C. (Foreign Area Studies), 1985, describes the limited and largely unfavorable image of the Soviet Union in the early 1980s and dramatically illustrates the progress it has made in the South Pacific over the past three years.

In addition to their economic efforts, the Soviets have made other attempts to improve their relations in the South Pacific. Until two or three years ago, Soviet diplomatic style was too brusque and heavy-handed for most islanders, who preferred more relaxed, easy-going diplomacy. Today, the Soviet Union sends much better informed, smoother, and more sensitive diplomats and visiting officials.³ Earlier this year, Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze visited Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand. Mr. Hayden, Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister of Australia, described him as urbane and entertaining, unlike his predecessor, Gromyko. On his trip, Shevardnadze emphasized peace, a nuclear-free South Pacific, his country's desire for trade, and its sympathies for the people of the area. Furthermore, he promised that there would be no Soviet military presence in the area.

In June 1986, for the first time, the Soviets congratulated the King of Tonga on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. In December 1986, shortly after the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (SPNFZ) went into effect, Ambassador Samoteikin flew to Suva Fiji to sign the protocols, announcing that the Soviet Union was proud to take this step toward a nuclear-free and more peaceful world. He failed to mention that the Soviets had attached several caveats: for example, if any of the signatory nations allowed nuclear ships in their waters, the Soviets would abrogate the treaty. Belatedly, these caveats have become widely known, but little can now be done to diminish the original Soviet political coup.

In addition to these diplomatic initiatives, the Soviets are also increasing their personal contacts and exchanges. During the author's September 1987 visit to Fiji, short newspaper items appeared about young Fijians having been selected to study in Moscow or eastern European countries. One student received a scholarship to study in Moscow from the International Union of Students after negotiations between the President of the Student Association of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and union leaders in Pyongyang, North Korea. Students

³In April 1988, PNG announced that the Soviets would open an embassy in PNG, though the date is unclear.

from New Zealand, Fiji, Vanuatu, PNG, Kiribati, and West Samoa were invited to the World Federation of Democratic Youth in Budapest in late 1986, while others had attended the International Union of Students in Prague in mid 1986. In February 1987, students in the region were invited to Moscow to participate in planning the 1989 youth festival to be held in Pyongyang, North Korea. Fijian delegates attended the June 1986 Eighth International Seminar on the Problem of Peace in the Pacific, held at Nahodka, the Soviet's submarine base in Siberia. Krishna Datt and Mahendra Chaudhry, Fijian union leaders, regularly attend the annual meetings of the communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions and individually visit Moscow. In February 1987, a Tongan delegation headed by the Crown Prince visited Moscow.

South Pacific islanders are often invited to meetings in Australia, such as a peace conference in Sydney in 1985, sponsored by members of the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia. And the Soviet cruise ship *Alexander Pushkin* regularly plies South Pacific waters, wines and dines local dignitaries, and in general spreads Soviet good will.⁴ In aggregate, these activities point up the modestly increased Soviet interest in the area and serve to enhance and amplify the Soviet image.

In summary, the declared and practiced policy of the Soviet Union in the South Pacific is one of increased contacts through diplomatic and economic channels; more informal relations through conferences, seminars, and student scholarships in the USSR; and official and unofficial visits both to and from the Soviet Union.⁵ The Soviet Union shuns any association with nuclear matters and military activities in the region and has proclaimed that it will never have a military presence there. Peace, a nuclear-free Pacific, trade, and good relations are its professed goals; its objective is an improved image in the region.

⁴ It also appears to carry listening devices similar to those of the fishing vessels.

⁵ Soviet activities are carried out with much greater skill, sensitivity, and style than previously.

Anti-Western Efforts in the Region

Other efforts to erode South Pacific goodwill and friendship for the U.S. and the West continue, with the ultimate goal of turning regional opinion against the West. Skillfully playing on the islanders' understandable prejudices against colonialism and nuclear testing, certain church and union leaders in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as others in education and the peace movement, have, during the 1970s and 1980s, led this anti-Western effort, a powerful supplement to the Soviet image improvement campaign.

Through the leftist leaning World Council of Churches (WCC)⁶ and the communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions, anti-Western leaders have worked to create the influential Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) and the Pacific Trade Union Community (PTUC) and have taken the lead in developing and spreading anti-Westernism at conferences, meetings, and through personal contacts.

Not surprisingly, the historical experience of the South Pacific islands has generated anti-colonialism and a desire for independence. These continue and are even growing, because the Western nations still are seen as the area's colonial powers. A strong anti-French attitude permeates the region, because France refuses to give up its colonies, especially New Caledonia. The United States is criticized because it still controls the military and foreign relations of Micronesia⁷ and, to a lesser extent, because it still holds American Samoa and Guam.⁸ Even Britain comes under fire because it holds tiny Pitcairn Island with its three score or so population. Indonesia is also viewed as a major colonial power since its takeover of Timor and Irian Jaya and since

⁶ The WCC includes several hundred churches from many countries with a broad spectrum of views. However, the WCC staff in Geneva includes some active Marxists, leftists, and liberation theologians who are anti-Western and apparently play a dominant role in headquarters activities.

⁷ There is also criticism, and perhaps envy, that the U.S. has helped Micronesia so much financially.

⁸ Guam and American Samoa are not serious cases, as there are no indigenous independence movements on these islands.

there are resistance elements in both places. The islanders are highly sensitive to the degree of colonialism still extant in the area and feel that it must be fully and finally terminated.

For most of the Pacific island states, political independence represented only the first step toward true independence; now they seek economic independence, a much longer-range and more difficult goal, given their limited resources. The islanders view multi-national corporations--or, as they are called in the region, trans-national corporations--merely as new forms of colonialism by the same foreign powers. To them, political colonialism has been succeeded by economic imperialism, and many of their financial frustrations are directed toward the Western powers, a tendency that can eventually result in anti-Western, anti-U.S. feeling and policies.

In spite of the mostly smooth and non-acrimonious transitions to statehood, Vanuatu excepted, anti-colonialism has apparently become stronger since independence than before. Once the islanders realized how much the colonial powers had curtailed their political freedom and suppressed their individual rights, their resentment against the long-imposed foreign rule intensified. They have tended to forget the past economic support the colonial powers provided and the present continuing contribution these same countries make; though this aid cannot stand as a reason to defend colonialism. At the risk of repetition, it cannot be overemphasized that the inherent anti-colonial attitudes in the islands are basic, understandable, indigenous reactions--a direct legacy of the colonial period.

The South Pacific islanders' strong distaste for nuclear testing and dumping began in the colonial period, but because the Soviets have not tested there, the islanders have absolved them from nuclear sins, and consider only the Western powers culpable. In fact, there is almost no discussion, perhaps no knowledge, of the vast Soviet nuclear capabilities.⁹ The United States ceased its nuclear activities in the

⁹ The PCC sponsored a glossy, well-illustrated book entitled *A Call to a New Exodus, an Anti-Nuclear Primer for Pacific People*, by Suliana Suwatibau and David Williams, Pacific Council of Churches, Suva, Fiji, 1982, which is a strong anti-nuclear treatise, mostly against the United States. The USSR is very infrequently mentioned and is not even listed in the top six world producers of uranium!

South Pacific in 1962, and today only France continues testing, causing much criticism of the West.

Unfortunately, the testing powers failed to consider adequately the sensitivities of the indigenous peoples or to take sufficient care about health hazards, although the U.S. made considerable efforts to avoid any damaging effects. The islanders realize that their region has been used as the major Western testing area for nuclear weapons, and they know these devices are the most lethal ever devised by man. Their fears and their determination to banish all nuclear activity from the area can be appreciated. Recently, a high official in Vanuatu said to the author, "You must understand that in this part of the world all the people feel deeply about the nuclear issue, regardless of their political beliefs."¹⁰

The Churches and Vanuatu Independence

Church activists were the first outsiders to seize on these issues and to develop the beginnings of the now powerful Independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific movement in the region. Contrary to their pre-World War II policy of generally supporting the colonial governments, the Western churches sent out missionaries after World War II who supported independence movements within these small colonies and publicized their cause abroad. This coincided with a politicizing or radicalization of some churches in Australia and New Zealand, as well as in the U.K. and U.S. Since the late-1960s, with encouragement and financial help from the WCC, the PCC has been consistently active in the Independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific movement.¹¹

A brief look at Vanuatu's independence movement will reveal the activist and often radical role played by the WCC and some national churches in the South Pacific in the 1970s. The ni-Vanuatu claim that they were the only ones in the South Pacific who had to fight for independence.¹² They are referring not only to their struggle against

¹⁰ Interview with top official of Vanuatu government by author in Port Vila, Vanuatu, April 4, 1987. Official requested anonymity.

¹¹ The WCC played a major role in establishing the PCC in the 1960s.

¹² The New Hebrides, now Vanuatu, were ruled by a British-French condominium--called the pandemonium by ni-Vanuatu, as these people now call themselves.

French foot-dragging during the independence campaign, but more important, to several French supported rebellions that occurred among the islands and were directed against the Vanuatu government just before and after its independence in July 1980.¹³

Although the ni-Vanuatu are extremely proud of winning their political independence, some of the country's leaders feel strongly that full independence has not yet been attained. Vanuatu must be economically, as well as politically, independent if it is to be a truly sovereign nation. This concept has intensified anti-colonial and anti-white feelings and the desire to be free of all outside interference, and it partially explains the government's anti-Western policies.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the churches were the primary source of education for the ni-Vanuatu, and they were the only institutions with experience in organization and leadership. Church membership also imparted status, and the ambitious and able joined. Many of these people emerged as national leaders.

The Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu, which claims 40 percent of the population as members, played a dominant role in the independence campaign, giving moral and financial support to the New Hebrides National Party (NHNP) and providing the foundation for its rural structure. It was split, however, between its political activists and its more conservative and non-political members. The former, in time, became the nation's political leaders. The Anglican Church, the second largest in Vanuatu, also supported the Party,¹⁴ which led the independence movement, though church support lessened as the Party became more militant. The third largest, the French-dominated Catholic Church, opposed both the Party and independence.

The World Council of Churches, in addition to supporting the PCC, also played a key role in providing outside leadership, moral support, and financial aid to the Vanuaaku Party. It organized and financed

¹³ An American institution, the Phoenix Foundation, and some American land speculators also aided the rebels and thus hurt the image of America.

¹⁴ In June 1977, the NHNP changed its name to Vanuaaku Party, often referred to as the Pati.

several conferences aimed at galvanizing church support for independence and specifically the Vanuaaku Party. One of the first was the January 1973 SPADES (South Pacific Action for Development and Economic Strategies) conference held in Port Vila, which greatly boosted the Vanuaaku Party both at home and abroad. SPADES, in fact, illustrates the important and often radical input of the churches. The conference was billed strictly as a church affair, in spite of its title, so the British allowed it to convene on British owned property and granted leave to some of their key Vanuatu employees to attend. The real purpose of the conference, however, was political--to develop a strategy for greater involvement of the churches in cultural, economic and particularly political affairs. Reportedly, militant and extremist speeches, racist remarks, and even talk of violence took place. Among the key foreign guests was Apolonarius Macha, a Tanzanian rural affairs officer, who offered his brand of socialism and ideas on land tenure. Many of which Father Lini, ordained Anglican clergyman and President of the NHNP and now Prime Minister of Vanuatu, is reported to have adopted. Liberation theologians were also in attendance. The political and extremist positions of the conference upset not only the French and British government officials, but many indigenous churchmen who did not approve of the churches' involvement in politics, especially radical politics. Some complained to WCC headquarters in Geneva that the WCC was more interested in politics than religion, but its political activities never ceased.

Overseas churches and the WCC played a major role in financing the Vanuaaku Party's independence campaign. The funds, given to the local churches, were often used to develop political awareness in rural areas and to finance "community development," a phrase often meaning political activity.¹⁵ The Reverend Rex Davis of the World Council of Churches staff, early in the 1970s, committed the WCC to this effort, and it provided generously.

¹⁵ The WCC and overseas churches also provided thousands for training, office supplies, and other support activities of the NHNP.

The churches, and especially the WCC, selected and invited to Vanuatu foreign churchmen to work and to attend area conferences on independence. Many of these invitees took very activist positions; several were liberation theologians who exerted considerable influence on the Vanuatu leaders. The United Presbyterian Church of the United States sent the Reverend Bill Coop, a devotee of Paolo Friere, the Brazilian liberation theologian, to work in Vanuatu from 1972 to 1974, a crucial period for the budding independence movement. Provided with a generous travel budget, he worked in all the islands to arouse the people's "political awareness." In 1974, Paolo Friere himself, then working for the WCC, was the featured guest at the Suva conference on Education for Liberation and Community, which followed SPADES. The WCC financed both conferences. Sethy Regenvau, a Vanuatu Party and Presbyterian Church leader, later organized seminars in Vanuatu based on this conference.

Vanuatu churches, along with other South Pacific churches, are now developing a theology of their own, the Pacific Theology, which will almost certainly be based on liberation theology. Thus the churches' theology and actions have tended to reinforce the idea of rebellion and struggle, as well as emphasize the evils of the West.

LABOR UNIONS IN FIJI

In Fiji, the unions, not the Christian churches, took the lead in independence and anti-Western and anti-U.S. movements. Many Indians had been brought to Fiji as indentured servants prior to World War I to work in the cane fields; others immigrated in search of economic opportunity and improved living conditions. During World War II, the Indians formed the South Pacific's first trade unions. They organized the cane fields workers in west Viti Levu island and gained the displeasure of the British government and the disdain of most Fijians by striking and refusing to fight in the war. Indians spearheaded the quest for independence, while the Fijians did not join the movement until the late 1960s, and then only to safeguard their future political position. They really had few complaints against the British, who had protected them

and their way of life. Most of the unions were permeated by strong anti-colonial (anti-British) feelings, based on the British refusal to accept the Indians as social equals or allow them full political representation.

The communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), at its ninth conference in Prague in 1978, resolved to make greater efforts in the South Pacific. This marked the beginning of considerable involvement of down under leftist union leaders working with local Fijian unions and labor leaders. While most South Pacific unions are affiliated with the non-communist, Western-oriented International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), most New Zealand and Australian labor leaders active in the region are associated with the pro-communist World Federation of Trade Unions. Well-known pro-Moscow union leaders, such as New Zealand's Jim Knox and Ken Douglas and Australia's Bill Richardson, John Halfpenny, and the late Pat Clancey (all of whom attended the Prague conference), began to take an active, even key role in the Fiji unions. Recently they have done likewise in Vanuatu. They helped create the Pacific Trade Union Forum (PTUF), now called the Pacific Trade Union Community, in 1980 and since then have increasingly injected a leftist and anti-Western political influence into the organization.¹⁶

Soviet trade union representatives have been present at all PTUF congresses from the first in Vanuatu in 1981 to the fourth in Auckland in 1986. In fact, John Halfpenny and Jim Knox (president of the New Zealand Federation of Labor) have led and dominated the meetings.¹⁷ In 1986, however, a few moderate Pacific labor leaders complained that leftist political issues were being emphasized while bread-and-butter union issues were being neglected. Jim Knox and others running the conference ignored these protests and continued the anti-Western political thrust of the Congress.

¹⁶ After a conference in Hawaii in 1980, the PTUF's first meeting was in Vanuatu in 1981.

¹⁷ Representatives from Freitlin (the Timor independence group) and May First (Philippine communist labor front) have attended the annual meetings. At the 1986 meeting the PTUF was renamed the PTUC. The leftist Japan Trade Union Organization (SOHYO) is also active and makes a considerable financial contribution to this effort.

In July 1985, the Fiji unions, angered by the government's late 1984 unilateral wage freeze, and urged on by Halfpenny and Knox, founded the Fiji Labour Party. Its first platform included nationalization, a non-aligned foreign policy, and support for the anti-Western rubric of the Independent and Nuclear-Free South Pacific movement. In its first electoral test, Labour won the Suva City Council election later in the year, and one of its members, Bob Kumar, became mayor of Suva. Then, in 1986, it joined forces with the major opposition party, the Indian-dominated National Federation Party (NFP), to form the NFP-Labour coalition. The Labour Party initially planned to take power in 1997, but the NFP-Labour coalition enabled it to succeed in 1987, ten years ahead of schedule!¹⁸

THE INDEPENDENT AND NUCLEAR-FREE PACIFIC MOVEMENT

Anti-nuclearism has become a highly emotional, anti-Western political issue which, combined with anti-colonialism, forms the foundation of the Independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific movement. As we have seen, this phenomenon began with the churches in the 1970s, soon gained labor union support, and is now a broadly based and, at least outwardly, loosely structured effort through which anti-Western themes have been developed and articulated.

Although the churches and unions have contributed significantly to the movement's growth, it was not necessary for outsiders to introduce anti-nuclear feelings; since the dawn of the atomic age, they have been indigenous to the region. Nevertheless, anti-nuclearism has become a guise for anti-Westernism, as becomes apparent in such movies as the Australian films, "Half-Life," "The War Game," or "The Final Epidemic," which can inflame emotions even more.¹⁹

¹⁸ In May 1987, however, a coup led by a Fijian nationalist, Colonel Rabuka, overthrew the popularly elected NFP-Labour government, and Rabuka is now ruling Fiji.

¹⁹ *PeaceLink*, the Australian peace movement magazine, lists a number of anti-nuclear video cassettes that can be rented. Video cassettes are available in most of the Pacific islands and are very popular.

The education community has provided another channel for anti-Western influence, especially at the college level. Many graduates of the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Pacific Theological College (PTC), both in Fiji, have become national leaders in their own countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, the USP's faculty included important leftist and Marxist elements; the PTC had its liberation theologians as well, who also effectively influenced its graduates. Thus the secular and religious schools both tended to encourage "activist" thinking in future island leadership and support for anti-Western movements.

Members of the peace movement have joined with church and union leaders and with educators to form an interconnected leadership supporting the independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific movement. Although still small, the active Fiji Anti-Nuclear Group, or FANG, illustrates the coalition of forces. FANG's president is Vijay Naidu, a staff member of the University of the South Pacific, and Mahendra Chaudhry of the Fiji Public Service Union and Trade Union Conference is one of the five executive committee members. The churches and the YWCA also participate in its activities.

By the early 1980s, resolutions that the PCC and PTUF conferences passed openly supported the Independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific movement, a rubric for anti-Western themes. In the mid-1970s, the churches helped institute and gave financial support to the first and second Independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific conferences, and by the time of the third conference in 1980 an Australian labor union began to do likewise. The fourth conference, held in Australia in 1986, received broad support from both groups.

The remarkably similar political positions professed by the churches and the unions illustrate the common goals of both groups. Table 1 lists trade union and church positions as stated in their respective regional organization meetings.

Table 1

SIMILAR THEMES ESPOUSED BY SOUTH PACIFIC ISLAND UNIONS AND CHURCHES

PACIFIC TRADE UNION FORUM	PACIFIC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
Trade union solidarity	Opposition to trans-national corporations*
Independence movements; cooperation with peace movement	Independence movements
Palau's anti-nuclear stand	Opposition to nuclear industry
Pacific zone of peace	Pacific zone of peace
Dissolution of military alliances (ANZUS)	Opposition to RimPac military exercises and to mutual defense treaties (ANZUS)**
Removal of foreign bases (American in Australia and Philippines)	Opposition to U.S. bases in Australia

* The Pacific Council of Churches sponsored and underwrote a book, *Losing Control: Towards an Understanding of Transnational Corporations (TNCs) in the Pacific Island Context*, James E. Winkler, P.C.C., Suva, Fiji, 1982, which mentioned none of the benefits but emphasized all the evils and shortcomings of the trans-national corporations and the damage they do to the people of the Pacific.

** The RimPac exercises have included Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States. ANZUS refers to the Tripartite Security Treaty of 1951 signed by Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S.

While the comparison makes interesting reading, it does not fully portray the one-sided, anti-Western slant of the discussion that took place when the issues were presented. The following position statements advocated by the two groups illustrate their inherent bias:

- Support the mistreated aborigines of Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii, but ignore, for example, mistreated Soviet minorities and the Chans, whom the Vietnamese have almost wiped out.

- Oppose increases of conventional weapons in the Pacific. Opposition is directed toward the RimPac naval exercises; however, no criticism is leveled at the Soviet buildup over the last decade, the Soviet Pacific fleet exercises in 1984, or the increasing size of the Vietnamese army.
- Call for the removal of all foreign bases from the area, specifically American bases in the Philippines and Australia, but ignore Soviet bases in Vietnam.
- Criticize U.S. aggression in Nicaragua, but not the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
- Attack colonialism of the West, but not the growing Soviet empire.
- Condemn the nuclear activities of the West, especially France, for nuclear testing and for operating nuclear ships in the Pacific, but remain silent about the nuclear ships and nuclear weapons in the Soviet Pacific fleet.
- Support liberation movements abroad, but only selectively, omitting mention of Afghan and Cambodian insurgents, UNITA in Angola, and Renamo in Mozambique.

Soviet Connections

The exact Soviet role is unclear because non-Soviets are the principal actors, and some participants are non-Soviet communists, but pro-Soviet union leaders from down under do play an important role. Some, like John Halfpenny, have long been members of the Communist Party of Australia (in the late 1970s, he joined the Labor Party, however) while others--such as Pat Clancey, recently deceased--have for many years been overtly pro-Moscow; in New Zealand, both Jim Knox and Ken Douglas have openly supported the Soviet Union. All have attacked the West. They visit Moscow frequently, attend the annual WFTU Congresses, and participate in many other Moscow-sponsored activities. Their pro-Moscow sympathies are publicly known, and they have tried to interject these views into the unions of the South Pacific. Suspicion exists that Soviet funds are also being supplied through the Soviet embassies in

Wellington and Canberra. These efforts, which work against the West and for the Soviet Union, pose a major long-term threat which deserves careful scrutiny.

No such public identification can be done for church leaders, the education community, and the peace movement, except to say that by association their participation in the World Council of Churches' activities, Moscow-sponsored peace organizations and conferences, and certain student unions would suggest at least a sympathetic leaning towards Moscow. While many of these people may be idealistic, well-intentioned, and unwitting participants--Reinhold Niebuhr often called them the "soft utopians"--others are quite aware of what they are doing. The extent of Soviet involvement can be infinitely debated, but what is clear and hardly arguable is that the Soviets are the beneficiaries of those activities, and the West the losers.

However, in August 1987, Mr. Hayden, Australia's Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister and one who should know about these matters, complained of the large number of Soviet-backed activities in South Pacific countries. He went on to say that Australian intelligence reports show that the Soviets are recruiting and funding local activists, primarily through third parties, and Soviet representatives were not directly involved. Whatever the ties with the Soviet Union, the coincidence of themes and positions of the Independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific movement and the Soviet Union is striking. For example, Mr. Gorbachev, in his Vladivostok speech, supported a number of positions listed below, the same ones that the unions and churches advocate.

- Opposes conventional weapons in the Pacific, and suggests a reduction in fleets and troops.
- Calls for the removal of all foreign bases from the region, particularly Americans from Subic Bay in the Philippines.
- Condemns all nuclear activities and approves of the SPNFZ treaty.

- Opposes all military groupings in the area. Gorbachev said that the Warsaw Pact applies only to Europe, whereas NATO is expanding its domain, and that the U.S. has several alliances in the Pacific.
- Unreservedly supports the Non-Aligned Movement.

Some Soviet themes are easily orchestrated with the indigenous music.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has devoted most of its discussion to Soviet image enhancement activities and to considerable outside as well as indigenous efforts by union elites, church leaders, and educators in pursuing what are, in fact, anti-Western campaigns. What have these various efforts accomplished? It is reasonably clear that the Soviet image among the elites of the South Pacific has greatly improved over the last few years. The Soviets' peaceful approach, expressed desire to trade, offers of aid, and their anti-nuclear and anti-colonial stands have had some effect on the region's leaders, as the acceptance of relations with the Soviets suggests. It is not certain how widespread or deep the effect has been, even on these elites. They have come very lately to world politics and only recently have become acquainted with Russians who, incidentally, are on their best behavior. It is equally difficult to assess the effects of the Independent and Nuclear-Free Pacific movement. However, at least some elites in many institutions have espoused anti-Western views.

Some of these ideas may trickle down to the people, but generally they are more interested in practical matters directly affecting their well being. How much anti-Westernism has penetrated the average islander's thinking is not really known. However, if the local rural preachers, the urban union leaders, and the country's teachers are continually exposed to an anti-Western philosophy, such ideas are likely soon to invest the broader population. Anti-Westernism is a long-term effort which often shows little outward progress, and Western nations can easily be lulled into complaisance.²⁰

²⁰ Among the people, there is still a vast reservoir of good will

The struggle for the islanders' minds and hearts is by no means lost, but most of the current inputs to this contest are against the West. In principle, most of us favor the ideals of self-determination, peace, and the abolition of nuclear testing; however, in the South Pacific they carry special, decidedly anti-Western connotations. Regrettably, the West has allowed the communists and leftists to capture these themes largely to the benefit of the Soviet Union and to turn worthwhile aspirations into political exploitation. The West must be more sensitive and responsive to the experiences, needs, and desires of the islanders and take steps to recapture the high moral ground.

toward America and the West, but how long it will last under constant attack is not clear.