

Employment relations in New Caledonia: Overview and focus on indigenous labour activism

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This presentation has two objectives. The first is to acknowledge that New Caledonia is absent from the English speaking literature in the field of employment relations. To rectify this, we will present an account of the major features of the industrial relations system and address the major issues of the day. Second, we will turn to the politics of the indigenous Kanak people's labour activism. The presentation is informed by two periods of field research, in July 2011 and 2014, including interviews with trade union leaders and a content analysis of data provided by government agencies, as well as on-going participant observation of the Kanak people's struggle for sovereignty (Graff 2012). New Caledonia has a rich labour history and a strong labour movement which can to a large extent be explained by the prevalence of its mining industry. Besides, there is a militant indigenous movement which for historical reasons intersects with and is channelled through organised labour. In the overall background of the colonial politics of reconciliation – the political platform for a 'Common Destiny' – which engulfs employment relations and social dialogue, we will reveal that key issues arising, such as inequalities and employment, often have a political content and, as a consequence, that contention becomes politicised across the racial and social divides of New Caledonia.

Graff, S (2012) 'Quand combat et revendications kanak ou politique de l'État français manient indépendance, décolonisation, autodétermination et autochtonie en Nouvelle Calédonie' *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, n°134 pp. 61–83.