

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

1

HARVARD Law School graduate Ed Clark, 50, is the Libertarian Party's candidate for the Presidential elections in November. As the chief spokesman for the newest political party in the USA, Clark says he wants to re-write the American Constitution – reshaping it in a form recognisable to the Founding Fathers.

The party, however, has grown impatient, and in the past 12 months some of its leading members have sought to write a constitution for an independent state in the Pacific, located on the tiny – but rich – island of Espiritu Santo.

In May, 50 French-speaking settlers led by plantation owner Jimmy Tupou Stephens led a revolt in a bid for unilateral independence. They announced that they feared a communist takeover. Their libertarian principles, however, concealed old-fashioned land-grabbing!

ESPIRITU SANTO is one of a chain of 80 islands which made up the French-British colony of New Hebrides.

Elections last October ensured that the first independent government would be led by an English-speaking nationalist party, Vanuaaku, which is dedicated to ending the privileges of the French *colons*.

Melanesian nationalism is not particularly militant, but it is at odds with the economic interests of French nationals. Philip Bowering reports:

Liberty &



"Vanuaaku was instrumental two years ago in taking over a few small private plantations, one or two of which were French-owned. There are large amounts of unused land, but there is still some resentment against early European land-grabbing, when the settlers appropriated communal land."

Thus, it was the fear that Vanuaaku would further infringe the private ownership of formerly communal land that led to the revolt on the richest of the islands, Espiritu Santo. The connections between Jimmy Stephens and the US Libertarian Party, then, ought to tell us something about the latter's political ideology.

THE LIBERTARIAN Party convention in Los Angeles last September chose Ed Clark as Presidential candidate. He told delegates:

"The success of our 1980 campaign will be judged by how effective we are in showing how the Libertarian principle of individual liberty underlies all of our positions on the issues and is the key to solving society's problems."

Clark beat Bill Hunscher to the nomination, which is just as well from the point of view of the rebels of Espiritu Santo. Hunscher told delegates: "Only libertarians believe

The French Connection

2

THE ECONOMIC base of Martinique is as firm as the shifting sands on its beaches.

The West Indian island is part of France: legally a *department* since 1946, enjoying one of the highest average living standards in the area.

The whole structure, however, could collapse as discontent grows among its population of 325,000. For tourism and social security disguise the fact that the island's economy has been eroded to the advantage of landowners.

TEN FAMILIES control 80% of the land. Thus, if Martinique were independent, the wages of labourers would be exceedingly low, for they would not be able to generate income through self-employment.

The island, however, enforces a legal minimum wage of £50 a week. This means that fewer people are employed than would

otherwise be the case. So between 5,000 and 10,000 young Martiniquais emigrate to France every year in search of work... while Air France flies ever-increasing numbers of highly-paid civil servants and tourist operators in the opposite direction in what is being called "genocide by substitution".

THE CLIMATE ought to give Martinique a natural advantage in supplying the sugar needs of metropolitan France.

Parisian politicians, however, responding to the demands of the numerically greater body of sugar beet growers in France, have rigged the price structure and all but killed off cane-cutting employment on the island.

Only two of the 20 sugar factories now operate, and Martinique has to *import* sugar for domestic consumption!

The French government did, at one point, attempt to rescue the

sugar cane industry by providing aid worth £14m. But, reports Swain:

"The money fell into the hands of an oligarchy of ten families who controls 80% of the land. They then use the money to boost production and provide jobs. Families put it into supermarkets, chains, hotels, tourism and import-export trade."

Thus, local landowners cash in on the package tours, and try to persuade themselves that islanders were satisfied with welfare handouts from the French taxpayers.

BUT THE illusions are being shattered. A Marie-Jeanne has been elected mayor of one of the island's important towns, and he is rejecting the Marxist ideology.

And the Progressive Martinican Party, the main black political movement, is likely to receive the help it may want from Castro on nearby Cuba.

The Spirit of Santo



FOUR American Libertarians (left to right): Bill Hunscher, Dr. John Hospers, David Bergland and the party's guru, Murray Rothbard. Does their philosophy on property rights have anything to offer the constitution writers? Report by FRED HARRISON.

you have the absolute right to control your life in a peaceful, non-aggressive manner."

For rebel-leader Jimmy Stephens knew that only an aggressive plot would protect the private ownership of the large coffee and cattle plantations on his island.

- Stephens met 20 party members in Los Angeles last September, including national chairman David Bergland and the 1972 Presidential candidate, Prof. John Hospers of the University of Southern California.

- Six months later, Stephens attended a "Preliminary" constitutional conference. The meeting was in Carson City, Nevada, home of property dealer and Libertarian Michael Oliver. According to Press reports, Prof. Hospers was given details of the proceedings.²

- In the effort to create a Libertarian constitution, the main conference was held in the New Hebrides. Oliver gave Stephens money and uniforms, but denies supplying weapons.

SOME WOULD argue that the land-owning interests of Jimmy Stephens and Michael Oliver were in direct conflict with the libertarian ideal of freedom of the individual.

These interests, however, happily co-exist with the Libertarian Party's manifesto.³ The party espouses a free trade/individual liberty programme; hence, monopolies (such as the US Postal Service) should be abolished, along with infringements on the right to own a gun, to smoke marijuana or to retail pornography.

On land, the party is unambiguously in favour of private and exclusive ownership, with no sharing of the economic benefits through the fiscal system.

Not only should all taxes be abolished, but government-owned land, including mineral resources, ought to be transferred to the private sector. Indeed, this philosophy of private ownership extends to the vast wealth at present largely out of the reach of mortal individuals:

"We oppose recognition of claims by fiat, whether made by nations or international bodies, to presently unclaimed property such as the ocean floors, broadcast bands, and planetary bodies. We urge the development of objective standards for recognizing claims of private ownership of such property, including transportation lanes, shell-fish beds, mineral rights, and fishing rights, based on homesteading concepts."⁴

THE ABSURDITIES of the Libertarian Party's policy toward land ownership are delicately ignored by its leading philosophers.

For example, Thomas Paine, in *The Rights of Man*, demonstrated that privately-owned land was in the main stolen from people by monarchs and their retainers. Contemporary American libertarians, however, overcome the logic of this observation by arguing thus:

"Land titles all over the world are sometimes acknowledged to be derived from coercion or fraud somewhere in the past. However, as long as the present owners were not themselves the aggressors, and no rightful descendants of the original victims survive, then the current owners must be considered the rightful owners based on the homesteading axiom."⁵

This spurious reasoning is not about to be exposed by the Cato Institute, the "think-tank" for American libertarians based in San Francisco. The institute has an etching of Thomas Paine on one of its walls; it is, therefore, familiar with the pronouncements of Paine on property.

The Institute, however, is funded to the extent of millions of dollars by 44-year-old Charles Koch. He inherited something between \$500m to \$700m, according to *Fortune*, wealth built on privately-owned Texas cattle ranches and Oklahoma oil.

ANOTHER San Francisco-based thinker, Henry George, maintained⁶ that there could be no individual liberty under a regime of exclusive private ownership of land.

He did not advocate a simplistic socialist solution: the collective ownership of land. Instead, his model was one of

ING SANDS . . .

Last March the Minister for the French Overseas Departments and Territories, Paul Dijoud, warned Havana that troops would be despatched to Martinique to ensure that France's piece of territory in the Americas would forever remain under Parisian control.

He promptly flew 220 gendarmes onto the island to reinforce his point that they would not entertain calls for independence — or "internal autonomy," as the island's deputy, Aime Cesaire, puts it.

The sabre-rattling did not impress the trade unions, however; in April they called a general strike. The economic conditions have now been created for another "war of independence," fermenting yet more geopolitical instability in a region already burdened with its share of problems.

* 'Utopia-in-the-sun feels first tremors of trouble', *Sunday Times*, 27.4.80.

private possession in which everyone shared, through the community, in the rental value of land – which the community created – through the fiscal system.

In terms of equity and economic efficiency, this is a perfect solution. It liberates the individual in his endeavour to earn a living; and it ensures that no-one is ultimately denied a share of the life-giving natural resources on which he relies for his very existence.

The beauty of this formula, however, is distorted by the Libertarian Party's chief guru, Murray Rothbard. He argues that, if we are to own the fruits of our labours, then we must own land as well; the two are inextricably mixed.

Rothbard concludes that if everyone is to have an equal share of land, he must take physical possession; and that, of course, is impossible.

"... it is obviously impossible for every person in the world to exercise effective ownership of his four-billionth portion (if the world population is, say, four billion) of every piece of the world's land surface."

And so Rothbard affirms: "To say that 'society' should own land or any other property in common, then, must mean that a group of oligarchs – in practice, government bureaucrats – should own the property, and at the expense of expropriating the creator or the homesteader who had originally brought this product into existence."

The anti-libertarian philosophy of property is finally laid bare by this statement by Rothbard: "It is difficult to see why a newborn Pakistani baby should have a moral claim to a quotal share of ownership of a piece of Iowa land that someone has just transformed into a wheatfield..."

HENRY GEORGE did not advocate the parcelling out of land to each and every individual. His solution was a tax on the annual value of land, which everyone would share through the national exchequer.

Rothbard, in his other writings, shows that the understood this, but pays no attention to the fiscal solution in *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, which is the Libertarian Party's "bible".

Thus the present generation of American libertarians, while seeking to create an institutional framework for political action, is failing to grasp the insights which led early 20th century libertarians like Albert J. Nock⁵ to nominate Henry George as a supreme spokesman for libertarianism.

The Libertarian Party wishes to break the stranglehold of the two-party system, yet no third-party candidate has succeeded since the formation of the Republican Party in 1856. (Only five have won any Electoral College votes at all, the last being George Wallace in 1968.)

The odds, then, are heavily against Ed Clark. Unless, that is, he can persuade his party to come up with an economic and ethical programme that matches his claim to represent the liberty of all individuals.

That, however, would not suit his party's financial backers. Nor would it attract would-be constitution-makers like rebel leader Jimmy Tupou Stephens. The banner of effective libertarianism has yet to be raised in America's political arena, and it now seems highly improbable that the Libertarian Party will fill the void.

REFERENCES

1. Philip Bowring, 'Confrontation in the South Pacific', *Financial Times*, 19.3.80.
2. Christopher Reed, 'US political group backs island rebels', *The Guardian*, 2.6.80.
3. 1978 Platform of the Libertarian Party: The Party of Principle, Adopted in convention, San Francisco, Calif., July 14-17, 1977.
4. *Ibid.*

JIMMY & THE WHITE MAN

CHAPTER 12 (Para. 71) of the Constitution of the New Hebrides states: "All land in the Republic belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendants".

This threat led to the rebellion by French landowners. For apart from the Melanesians, only the government may now own land.

Rural land will be owned according to custom. Urban land taken by the government will be held on perpetual lease. According to a communique on land policy issued by Sethy Regenvanu, the Minister of Lands: "The custom owners of land that becomes urban or public shall have the right to a continuing share of the revenue raised by the government from the use of that urban or public land" (para. 7).

These provisions ought to have been welcomed by Jimmy Stephens, for he has stated: "White men were making profit from the land, but the black people were not getting anything from it."

In his fight to recover some of the land for traditional owners, Stephens has been sent to gaol. This made his alliance with the French paradoxical. A possible explanation can be found in the useful study by Barak Sope.² He contends that Stephens, in the fight for land for supporters of his movement (Nagriamel), was outsmarted by the French.

The French agreed to concede some land in Luganville. But, writes Sope: "The movement could have taken back the whole Luganville property if it had kept up its political pressure. By reaching this agreement, the colonialists are now in the position to develop more land than the Nagriamel is capable of doing."

Sope traces the arrival of the original European land speculators in the 1870s, and their successors a century later – Hawaiian-based speculators. In 1971, the British authorities moved to stop the sub-division of land – "The French were more reluctant to control land speculation because their nationals were involved."³

It was land alienation that generated a movement for political independence. The National Party wrote into its policy in 1975: "That land speculation be discouraged." It remains to be seen if, in the long run, the heirs of Jimmy Stephens can thwart this aspiration.

¹New Hebrides: *The Road to Independence*, Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1977, p.35.

²*Land and Politics in the New Hebrides*, Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Assn., n.d., pp. 28, 33.

³New Hebrides, *op. cit.*, p.44.

● PROF. Andrew Strathern, head of the Dept. of Anthropology at University College, London: "On Santo the biggest issue undoubtedly had to do with land, stemming from the sale, in 1967 onwards of some 4,000 building lots, mostly to Americans – this was also the year when Nagriamel began." *The Guardian*, 31.7.80.

BRITAIN has offered the New Hebrides an aid package worth £23m. But if the British were stingy towards their former colonial subjects, the French were "shameless," according to an official in the new government led by Prime Minister Walter Lini. The French, it seems, sought to make their aid contingent upon a commitment that French interests would be safeguarded. What were these? According to *The Guardian's* Far East correspondent, Robert Whyman ('An inheritance of neglect', 30.7.80): "Right up to the last minute, France manoeuvred for guarantees for French settlers' land tenure..." Lini's government is investigating the cost of setting up a system of land taxation on the islands.

5. Carl Watner, *Towards a Proprietary Theory of Justice*, Baltimore, 1976.
6. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1976; originally published in 1879.
7. Murray M. Rothbard, *For a New Society: The Libertarian Manifesto*, New York: Macmillan, 1978 revised edn., pp. 34-35.
8. And recently Prof. C. Lowell Harris in his critique of Rothbard in R. V. Andelson, ed., *Critics of Henry George*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1979.