

Correspondence

Dear Friends,

You were making jokes about my "search for paradise" when I told you that I was going to the South Seas. I assured you I was only looking for a nice, warm, quiet spot to relax a bit.

When we arrived at Faaa airport in Tahiti, everything seemed alright. Bare-footed men and women in colorful pareos and with flower wreaths on their heads, singing those embarrassingly kitschy songs. Immigration was quick. But when we asked for hotels, we were informed that the city was on fire, the streets blocked, the cheap hotels in the downtown area evacuated. "Ils sont fous," (they're crazy) everybody told us. The air smelled of smoke. The taxi-driver was nervous. "I hope they're not coming to our place..." he said.

Next day we got the whole story. The dockers had been on strike. They asked for 7 more men to be hired, 29 instead of 22. The dockers had occupied the quais. Police—intervention. Rocks thrown at them. Tear gas. The dockers crossed the bridge, came to the downtown area. They were joined by "hooligans," irresponsible elements of all sorts. Cars are burnt. Houses set on fire. "A strike turns into social revolt," as the local newspaper (*La Depeche*) puts it. La Legion Etrangere comes in. More fires, more shops attacked.

Isn't it funny? The headlines in the papers were almost identical to those we had in Zurich in 1980 when another "earthly paradise" lost its innocence. Then it was bad for the banking business, now tourism is in danger. (And my nice

quiet holiday.)

From the point of view of social mechanism, the riots are pretty clear: it's a B-C combination. A very young and small working class combined with "unguaranteed workers," each contributing its typical way of struggle (disproduction and disruption).

Explanations are easy. The Left from Paris is sympathetic to those "who have been excluded from development." In the same issue, former French Prime Minister Fabius (a socialist) insists on the necessity of nuclear tests in Mururoa (where the Legionnaires were flown in from). Tahiti is an apartheid society. The very few rich (tourists or people in the tourist business) lead a metropolitan lifestyle, have villas, yachts, cars, etc. Around them the natives get a few jobs, sit around without any purpose, with no access to anything except coconuts, sunbaths, etc. Life is expensive: a beer (in the store) costs \$1.50. Retreat to any kind of traditional lifestyle is impossible: land has been used for hotel resorts, knowledge is lost, the sea polluted, families destroyed. It's no fun sitting in a hut while cars race by and fat tourists peep in.

Development is as mad as the return to a "primitive lifestyle." So the status quo will need its guardian angels for quite a while. The Pacific isn't any more what it used to be. On Fiji, Colonel Rabuka tries to defend the rights of the native population with fascist methods. And puritan bigotry: he banned lawn-mowing on Sundays. (Had he banned

lawns, he at least would have been an ecological hero.) Cuban, Libyan, and East German agents are lurking in the background, of course. So the "future" might hold as a "solution" some kind of christian-fundamentalist-military dictatorships, using "traditional lifestyle" as an ideological cover. The "bad influence of tourists" can be a pretext of shutting off people from any influences...

So, dear friends, no paradise is in sight. Just more struggles, more repression, more madness. What do the "hooligans" want? Independence, more jobs, more money, access to development. Sitting in the palace, not in the hut or destroying both. The dockers got their demands met, actually. But they are very few and "privileged" because they've got a job (they're even paid when there is no work).

Somehow there seems to be no way out. Struggles turn into development, development into crisis, crisis into struggles. A not so merry-go-round.

Yet there must be a vision of another type of life, relaxed for sure, but also open, world-wide, based not so much on work (and the work it presupposes) but on "savoir vivre" (sounds colonialist in Tahiti), on a new type of subsistence that's not just misery. Strangely, it's too hot and humid here to think about these things. The "way out" is not a geographical problem—that's sure.

Now let's check out the next island.

Yours,

(The author of "Fire and Ice: Space Wars in Zurich," in *Midnight Notes* #4, *Space Notes*)

