

New caledonia

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There are two primary facts about New Caledonia that are particularly interesting and unique. The first is that it was formally colonized by the French in 1864, and for the next four decades following, it served as a Penal Colony. The prison of 'New Caledonia', which housed thousands of French felons, would serve until 1897 when the penal nature of the island ended (World Infozone, New Caledonia).

In addition to its use as a penal colony, New Caledonia is also unique for its natural resources. For a stretch during the prominence of Nickel, New Caledonia as the world's fourth largest exporter of Nickel, experienced great economic growth (Australian Radio ABC. net, New Caledonia). However, as the world demand for nickel has declined, the economy has struggled to regain its previous levels of prosperity.

The Penal Colony

New Caledonia was settled by both Britain and France during the first half of the 19th century. Eventually, by 1853, it was officially colonized by France, and has remained in France's possession ever since (Virtual New Caledonia). "New Caledonia was founded as a penal colony, and the first shiploads of convicts were shipped from France to New Caledonia in 1864" (Logan, Leanna, p. 16, 2001). The conditions of the four-month sail from France to the new colony were horrible, and the few that did survive ended up living in small makeshift huts. They were responsible for all of the colony's public works; they built churches, and carved roads out of the landscape (Logan at p. 16).

The most terrible of the convicts sent over were kept in dungeons, and were put to extreme hard labor. They were beaten, and within twenty years of the colonies formalization as a French colony, the guillotine made its way to the colony (Logan at p. 16). The guillotine would be used with regularity once arriving, and during its first 21 years 80 people felt its blade (Logan at. 16).

New Caledonia, in all, would house more than 21, 000-22, 000 convicts from France. This number would end, as in 1898, Le Governor Feillet decided to close the flow of “ The dirty water spigot”, as he termed it. He eventually ended the delivery of prisoners to the island (Croixdusud. info, New-Caledonia). Although the flow of prisoners stopped, the actual camps continued until 1922, when 2310 prisoners were still held in camps (Croixdusud. info, New-Caledonia).

The prison colony created several problems during its operation, including the fact that the population was almost exclusively male. In addition, the large influx of various felons meant that eventually, many would be released, and the nation became a dangerous haven of ex-convicts.

Nickel as Export

The mineral industry of New Caledonia is dominated by Nickel (Lyday, Travis Q., 1999). The French government, who earned 60% of the New Caledonia share, initially dominated nickel production in the area, while Japanese led companies (10%) and New Caledonia (30%) shared the balance (Lyday, Travis Q., 1999).

Although large for a Pacific Island, New Caledonia's only true export of immense value is Nickel. As such, the economy is highly dependant upon

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the market economy for the mineral. There are several uses for Nickel, and the market has shown major changes since the 1960's (Cranfield, Peter, 2006, p. 2).

The peaks of usage rates for the United States were in the 1960's, which were the golden age of post war growth. During this time, the world had a growth rate of 7% for Nickel use, and the economy of New Caledonia felt the influx of this wealth of demand (Cranfield, Peter, 2006, p. 2). However, in each of the decades to follow, the demand growth has dwindled to 2%, and it does not appear to be increasing again any time soon.

The products created from Nickel range from: stainless steel (62%), non-ferrous alloys (15%), batteries (4%), playing (7%), alloy steels and foundry (5% each) (Cranfield, Peter, 2006, p. 3). It is very likely that the creation of new demand for nickel, much like the world has seen with stainless steel, will be instrumental in maintaining the economy of the island nation. At the moment, China accounts for all increases in the demand for nickel worldwide. Other exports like coffee and tourism assist New Caledonia's economy, but nickel will remain its staple.

Facts and Conclusions

New Caledonia, as of 2006, has a population of 230, 000 people (BBC News, 2006). The major languages are French, Melanesian and Polynesian Dialects. The major religion is Christianity, and the monetary unit is the Pacific Franc (BBC News, 2006). The head of state is the French president, although there is a sovereign leader in New Caledonia, which has spurred inconsistent rumblings of an independence movement. (BBC News, 2006)

The representatives are freely elected, although are very polarized along country lines.

The media is considered free, and there are various radio stations that are private in nature (BBC News, 2006). The country is gaining some rights independent of France, as French citizens have been refused the right to vote in the nation subject to residency requirements. (BBC News, 2006) There are rumors that the nation will vote for its independence between 2014 and 2019 in a referendum.

The two most interesting facts about New Caledonia may be its nickel productions amazing level of world contribution, and the fact that it was colonized by the French for the sole purpose of housing its prisoners. Although much of the impact of the penal camps are now gone, nickel remains the driving force of the economy.

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