

BLOODLESS REVOLUTION PROCURES SUPPORT FOR DE GAULLE

On the eve of the day set for the demonstration of de Gaullist sympathies Governor Denis sent a patrol from the gunboat with fixed bayonets into Noumea. Stones were thrown at it and it was hooted; the patrols broke rank and chased excited young Noumeans down the streets.

Next day bush settlers arrived for all points of the island. Sailors manned machine guns on arterial routes to prevent their entry to the town, but they gained entry for all that. Business premises and stores failed to open and a dense crowd formed in Coconut Square, round the Town Hall. Banners and Free French flags were prominent, the latter being hoisted at the Town Hall, at the Signal Station and on Semaphore Hill.

At Government House the crowd demanded the resignation of Governor Denis in favour of Henri Sautot, who then was aboard a Norwegian cargo vessel in the harbour with the Australian cruiser Adelaide rounding Ile Nou. Denis the previous evening declared with forecfulness that never would he abdicate and if Sautot landed he would have him arrested, together with the de Gaulle committee. Nevertheless the Free French leaders force his hand and Denis tearfully agreed.

Sautot was then invited to come ashore by the de Gaullist leaders to become New Caledonia's Governor. For once in their lives Caledonians forgot their 11 o'clock lunch and welcome Sautot ashore under the guns of the "Dumont d'Urville". The milling throng greeted him with flowers and he headed the procession to Government House. In the dramatic interview that followed Denis called Sautot a traitor and again threatened his arrest. Finally Sautot came out on to the balcony and told the people that in spite of the influence of

Vichy agitators and their attempts at a coup d'etat, New Caledonia ranged itself alongside the British Empire and de Gaulle as the population demanded. The crowd dispersed, satisfied, and Sautot took over the Governorship of New Caledonia at the instigation of de Gaulle.

Later in the day, however, Denis again said he refused to resign and despatched notes to public service officials demanding that they obey only his orders. The people, hearing this, returned in a body and demanded the immediate departure of Denis. Denis left by a rear entrance but was shortly captured and made a prisoner of the Troop Commander and put into "preventive" custody at La Foa, well away from Noumea. Summoned by the Governor, the officials agreed to continue their duties and Government House was put under guard by a few young civil volunteers armed with deer-hunting rifles.

Although sailors aboard the "Dumont d'Urville" declared their sympathies for the Free French, they were confined to their ship, while the commander schemed for Denis' restoration. The settlers insulted him, but he refused to sail. The Adelaide was cruising in the harbour to take care of possible fighting. At the same time a plot was hatched by the metropolitan officers at the barracks to secretly counter-revolt, first disarming the Caledonian-born garrison. This leaked out and immediately the settlers swarmed back into the town and the plan failed.

Finally the "Dumont d'Urville" capitulated and departed and military and civil officers with Vichy sympathies sailed for Saigon. In December an Administrative Council replaced the General Council, suppressed in November with the Privy Council. Hostile civil service heads were also dealt with.