

Peace Corps Marianao

Box 546
Saipan, Mariana Islands 96950

L.O.U.

Comments of Situation in
The Marianas

by Farley Maxwell
Peace Corps/Dist. Dir.

3/15/71

High Commissioner Johnston has stated that there are only two generally accepted facts related to the recent fire which destroyed the Congress of Micronesia building. First it is a fact that there was a fire, and second, it is a fact that it was intentional. All other comment on the blaze and surrounding events falls into the realm of speculation. The following comments must be identified from the outset as speculation.

Yet, speculate we must. The fire, tensions surrounding the income tax law, the Santos position statement for the Marianas, rumors of arms caches, threatened demonstrations, and poor press all require a response that goes beyond the limit of generally accepted facts. This report will be a review of and assessment of the current scene in the Marianas as it seen by the District Director of the Peace Corps. It will venture some subjective projections of what might be anticipated. Finally, it will consider any implications for Peace Corps personnel and programming.

The Current Scene

Things are normal on Saipan. Except for the few people whose routine or responsibilities put them in contact with the Congress of Micronesia and its staff, day to day life has gone on unchanged. There has been no interruption of normal life. Press reports to the contrary were false.

The Congress of Micronesia specifically, and the political structure of the Trust Territory in general are in the midst of a serious challenge. The way the ^{issues} are settled could basically change the future of Micronesia and the Marianas. There is virtually no prospect of "revolution", but some serious hard headed negotiation are no doubt in the offing. The recent session of the Marianas Legislature included some resolutions about arms, a militia, and secession by force, if necessary. The High Commissioner has correctly branded them a having only "shock value".

The big issue is real and should not be disregarded in the same sweep with the shock value resolutions. It challenges the evolving reality of Micronesia itself. The statement by Vicente N. Santos, President of the Marianas District Legislature, represents a commitment of both direction and action. Other districts will probably not agree with the chosen Marianas direction, and in any case, are not yet so ready to act. //The Marianas leaders are taking a positions that they are ready to move toward greater self-government and closer political ties with the United States. They see the trusteeship agreement specifically, and the relationship with the other districts potentially, keeping them from moving in this direction. // *

22
AG - 430083

2/5/1977

Maxwell in the Marianas

pg 2

The Santos statement should be read completely. No Marianas leaders have publicly taken exception to its general thrust. The general popular validation of this position has been in three plebiscites in the Marianas (1961, 63, 69) the full discussion with present leaders on the islands (which Santos states took place), and most fundamentally by the decisive election of "Popular Party" candidates to both the District Legislature and the Congress of Micronesia. He notes that the actual political relationship of Marianas to the other districts in the trusteeship has only been since 1962. Previous to that time he states, "We all existed in the same ocean, but they did not bother us and we did not bother them."

Americans cannot help but be flattered by the statement of intent and the proposed path for achieving their goal. He states, the people of the Marianas are pro-American and want out of the trusteeship agreement." If negotiated ways are not found to accomplish this end, he proposed a unilateral "declaration of independence" and the calling on a "Constitutional Convention".

It is within the context of this substantial political problem that the fire at Congress, the income tax tensions, the poor press, the rumors of arms build ups and the potential for violence takes place.

People in the Marianas do not regard the Congress of Micronesia with the hallowed respect that an American might muster for building, people, and traditions that make up our Congress in Washington. Both in its youth and as a symbol of contrived unity, it offers little to touch the heart of the average citizen of Micronesia. If we take the Santos statement seriously, neither does the Congress offer anything but an obstacle to the aspirations of the future. There is a problem. Obviously arson is not the way to solve it, but maybe it is away to focus attention on the problem. Such methods are too well established in the rest of the world to let them go unused in Micronesia.

The income tax bill, be it political football, foundation of independent Micronesian government, or unjust exploiter of the people of the Marianas, falls in the same category as the Congress itself. It further complicates the problem of the relationship of the districts, while offering little promise to the people of the Marianas, at least as they have come understand it.

The threats of violence are, like the talk of arms, most potent when picked up by the press and used for shock value. There are arms on the island. Reliable people talk of seeing machine guns, other automatic weapons, and hand grenades in private homes. The likelihood of their use is small. One need only ask, "Who is going to use these weapons on whom?" The enemy is a political fabrication or a symbol. The peoples of the Micronesia districts are too far apart to fight with fire arms and within the Marianas there is no visible basis for armed factions.

22
16-430084

Some Projections

The obvious projection that comes from such an analysis of the problem is "hard times" for the Congress of Micronesia, the Trust Territory Government, the U.S. as administering authority, and the United Nations. The power decide the issue does not rest in the Marianas.

Specifically, Congress will not be able to function with the solid decent of a geographic/cultural minority. Some accommodation will have to be made. To bring the Marianas back into line so that congress can function, the choices are either the carrot or the stick.

An example of "the carrot" would be the removing of some of the laws which Marianas leaders believe limits present development. Those laws restricting foreign investment are repeatedly cited. The "stick" might be the threat to move the seat of the government to another District, like Truk or Ponape, and leave the Saipanese without the many employment opportunities and economic advantages that come with TT headquarters. Both of these alternatives would not change the direction which has been set. The carrot would let the pressure off, the stick would invite outright secession.

The projected response of the Trust Territory Government is also now in limbo. The end of the trusteeship agreement through which this appointed administration gains its authority is an increasingly pressing reality. It is clear that it will not be possible to merely talk about resolving the political status question for an indefinite number of years in the future. For both practical and policy reasons the trusteeship agreement, which Marianas leaders feel has outlived its usefulness, cannot be ended by the various districts independently. As long as this policy holds one can only predict the increase of pressure on all to end the trusteeship. The practical problem is that the administrative seat of the government is in the "rebel" district.

The United States seems to be caught with a stand-off of administrative departments, which can only agree to take no action and make no long term commitments. State, Defense, and Interior are all involved in the present problems and have vested interest in the final solution. Given all of these other problems, the Marianas and Micronesia may seem like "the mouse that roared". The roar will grow louder, and merely increasing budget allocations will not allow them to indefinitely put off decision.

The United Nations is considered a focal point of world opinion. There is a tendency to appeal to the UN as the conscience of the administration. Two forums are worth watching might be the Security Council which must accept the proposed end of the Strategic Trust, and the "Committee of 35" which has been invited to send a delegation to the islands by the Congress of Micronesia. The latter committee is the investigating body against colonialism and is heavily made up of "Eastern Bloc" and new (ex-colonial) nations. The possibilities for pangs of conscience are great.

Peace Corps Implications

The meaning of this for the operation of Peace Corps in the Marianas is still in doubt. The immediate safety in a potentially volatile situation for Volunteers and staff is the concern of some. The long term programming implications are the concern of others. Each days news and countless conversations bring new thoughts about both of these. These comments, therefore, must be regarded as highly dependent and subject to change.

I believe that there is little immediate danger to Peace Corps staff and Volunteers based on Saipan. A successful policy of no political involvement, and a broad base of programming support are partly to be credited for this position. Peace Corps is not regarded in the Marianas as something which is unwanted, and accepted only because of headquarters pressure. The American model is a positive one in the Marianas, and Peace Corps Volunteers are one of the more attractive realities of that model.

A recent survey of acts of violence against Peace Corps persons and related property did not reveal anything that could be substantially interpreted as anti-Peace Corps or anti-American. There has been a growth of violence on Saipan in recent years, but it seems to have a general public orientation. By any modern urban standard, Saipan is still a rather safe place to live and serve.

Our primary programming thrust continues to be in education, which in one sense is non-political, but in another fits very much into the stated objectives of the Marianas leaders. The schools have been criticized for being too American. Peace Corps does not set the curriculum, but it is vital to carrying it out.

For those who look to an opening in the future of development opportunities through outside capital, another new Peace Corps type opportunity (or need) is in the offing. Where will the trained man power come to process plans and guide investments so that the gross errors of rapid development learned in other parts of the world will not be repeated here? The building of an adequate jet air-strip, and several major tourist hotels would have an immense impact on the quality of life on Saipan.

In any kind of political affiliation with Guam and through it to the United States, the Marianas would be the "poor sisters". The very economic drain which they fear by association with the less developed districts of Micronesia, might be feared in reverse as the people of the Marianas seek to align with more developed groups. In short, instead of being the richest place in its current political configuration, the Marianas might be the poorest. Whether it is the Peace Corps, or some other manpower agency, that responds to this new poverty, relatively conceived, is speculation even beyond the scope of this paper.

In short, I would say that present program emphasis in education is well based for any political contingency. The promise of rapid development might bring a new specialized kind of need that Peace Corps could respond to as it evolves.

22
16-430086

3/15/71

Maxwell on the Marianas

page 5

Finally, the Peace Corps is relatively secure because it has a solid base of success in Micronesia. The Marianas has not been the most dramatic place for this, and is not today the easiest place to serve out for the foreseeable future there is still much to be done.

22
K6-430087