

TRUST-ISLE PARTY ASKS NATIONHOOD

Independence Group Formed in U.S. Pacific Territory

By ROBERT TRUMBULL

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Micronesian nationalists have formed a new political party favoring independence for their strategic central-Pacific islands, which are now administered by the United States as a United Nations trust territory.

Formation of the new party, the first political grouping to operate in all the islands, is regarded as one of the most significant developments in the growing conflict between Micronesian leaders and American officials over the political future of the 2,141 islands and atolls in a commanding position on the sea routes between North America and Asia.

The islands consist of the Marshall, Mariana and Caroline archipelagoes southwest of Hawaii. They are known officially as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The population of about 100,000 speaks eight different languages, and the culture varies considerably from island to island.

The new party, called the Independence Coalition, includes 11 of the 33 members of the Congress of Micronesia, the elected legislature of the islands, according to Micronesian sources.

U.S. Offer Rejected

Micronesian representatives rejected an offer by Washington last year to join the United States permanently as a commonwealth, with a status like that of Puerto Rico. The American negotiators refused a Micronesian counterproposal for "free association," a looser relationship that would have left the islands self-governing in internal affairs.

Under the arrangement pressed by the Micronesians, the islanders would have been free to sever the American link and become independent at any time with or without American agreement.

Earlier this year, the district legislature of the Mariana Islands voted to secede from the Trust Territory and form a separate association with the United States. Both the United States and the United Nations would have to agree to any such procedure, and that is considered unlikely.

A drafting committee of the United Nations Trusteeship Council, representing Britain and France, urged the council this week to oppose the secessionist move.

Dissidents on Saipan, the principal island of the Mariana group and seat of the Trust Territory government, are suspected of having set the fire that destroyed the Congress of Micronesia building in February. The five elected representatives of the Marianas boycotted the opening of the May session of the congress, held on Moen Island in the Truk group. Micronesian nationalist students in Hawaii have organized a group called the Micronesian

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Micronesian nationalist students in Hawaii have organized a group called the Micronesian Independence Advocates. The young members are likely to include many Micronesian political leaders of the future, because of their superior education in a relatively unsophisticated society.

Meanwhile, the desire of the island people for political advancement, if not independence, has been pressed by their political leaders at the United Nations and in Washington.

The Congress of Micronesia has engaged three qualified academics as political advisers. They are Prof. James W. Davidson, a Pacific affairs specialist at the Australian National University in Canberra; Dr. Eugene Mihaley, a political scientist at the University of California at Berkeley; and Dr. Thomas Gladwin, an anthropologist formerly of Yale and the University of Hawaii.

Professor Davidson was prominent in the successful independence movements of Western Samoa, a former German colony and later a New Zealand dependency that achieved sovereignty in 1962. Dr. Gladwin, a former United States official in Micronesia, is an advocate of independence for the islands.

Since Western navigators discovered the islands beginning in the 16th century, they have been ruled successively by Spain, Germany, Japan and United States.

Washington administers the Islands through the Department of the Interior, with the Departments of State and Defense taking a close interest. The Nixon Administration is said to be preparing a new blueprint for a permanent association of the islands with the United States, which is expected to be put before Micronesian representatives at a meeting reported to be planned tentatively for August on the Hawaiian island of Maui.

President Nixon has appointed Dr. Franklin Hayden Williams, president of the Asia Foundation, as his personal representative in negotiations with the Micronesians.

Meanwhile, Micronesian representatives are reported to have invited members of the United Nations Committee on Decolonization to send a delegation to the islands. This move, which could result in strengthening sentiment in the United Nations for Micronesian independence if the invitation is accepted, is said to have irritated Washington.

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