

U.S. Colonialism.....

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Most of us Americans will agree, quite readily, to the fact that we are poor colonialists—and always have been.

We think that is primarily because our nation was formed by fighting the Grand-daddy of all Colonialist powers, England, for our independence. About that same time, except for a few excursions into colonialism, the United States has always believed that men everywhere should be free. We pursued that goal in Cuba, back in the Spanish-American War, and allowed Cuba its independence. We agreed about the same time that the Philippines could also have its independence, at a time that such thinking was not of the norm.

In other examples of colonialism, such as Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico our government decided instead to allow them to join the union in one form or another. Even in Guam, and the Virgin Islands, the trend has been good to this point, first granting citizenship to the islanders, and then slowly allowing them to elect their own leader, and to control their own budget and economy. Autonomy seems to be the key word in our colonialistic patterns.

Only in the Trust Territory have we felt that we generally have done a bad job over the years. Mainly because of a lack of interest in the islands, we felt that we haven't done enough in public works, in roads, hospitals, schools, sewer and water, airports, and all the rest. While a great movement forward is now taking place, we still look back on our 25 years of administration as one of, largely, ineptness.

Yet, reading a letter from Rep. John A. Mangefel, Yapese member of the Congress of Micronesia, which appeared in Wednesday's Daily News, we wonder. After reading the letter we felt just a little proud that we were Americans, and maybe, perhaps, our record in Micronesia really isn't all that bad.

Rep. Mangefel was replying to a man who had written earlier, expressing his puzzlement over why the Micronesians had not questioned the Japanese when they fortified the islands before World War II, and wondered why they were objecting to U.S. bases now. Mangefel told of the history of Micronesia, of the Spanish days, and their insistence on subjecting the islanders to their religious beliefs. "They decided it was good for us and that's all there was to it." The Germans came, Mangefel said, "and they were no different from the Spaniards. In fact, they claimed that the islands were theirs since they bought them from the Spaniards. ~~Again, this country started to think for us and planned our ways. We were not consulted at all.~~"

Then Mangefel noted that the League of Nations "took upon themselves the job of thinking, planning and forming the course of Micronesia's destiny....and gave the mandate of the Micronesian Islands to Japan," again without consulting the local population. The Japanese," he said, "were no different from their predecessors. They controlled, geared, formed and shaped the islands' future. It was taken for granted that Micronesians did not know, or perhaps were incapable of knowing, what they wanted...the Japanese trained the Micronesians to think, act and behave as they wished them to." Mangefel, in writing about where the Micronesian voices were during the Japanese fortification, said that the Micronesians did "not know what such voices or rights did exist at all."

Then came the Americans. Listen to what Mr. Mangefel says about that: "But the American Administration did a very peculiar thing. That is to say that the Americans launched a very sincere and genuine education program at this time. Americans taught us the idea of democracy. Micronesians were told that, not only were they allowed to speak their minds but that they actually had the RIGHT to form or give an opinion."

Now as we listen to Micronesian radicals expound against the American administration, we can at least gather some comfort in the fact that we, as has no nation before it, taught the Micronesians that this was the way free men lived. We expect them to stand up and say what they think. Not only do we tolerate, but we encourage it.

Frankly, as Americans, we should feel only pride when our administration is criticized by the Micronesians, because we not only live freedom, but we live it, and encourage others to live it.

How about other nations in the Pacific? How have they fared? Well, the British have abandoned many of its former colonies, such as Fiji, Tonga. The French haven't done as well, and French Polynesia still screams for more local autonomy. We pointed out the other day that New Hebrides, an island chain with as many people as Guam, isn't even allowed the courtesy of a local legislature. The British and French High Commissioners rule by executive fiat. The British also make no pretense about Hongkong either. It is a colony, pure and simple. The four million people don't have any local vote, no say in the operation of the colony.

No, by and large, the United States has shown consideration and respect for the local people. We know that we have encouraged the Micronesians into pushing for an independence status, and now let us hope that we let them exercise a vote for that goal. After all, freedom is an American dream, and we can do no less for those under our administration than to actively endorse such a dream for them.