

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

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TO : Bill Crowe

DATE: June 12 '72

FROM : John Dorrance

SUBJECT: Attached

The attached assessment of the Congress of Micronesia ^{PALAU SESSION} will appear in the next issue of the Micronesian Reporter magazine. It was written by Bonifacio Basilius, a Palauan with the administration in Koror. Except for a ~~couple~~ couple of basic errors (e.g. Marianas attitude on revenue-sharing) it is an impressive piece of work.

I would urge that you reproduce and distribute it to the Inter-Agency Group, and to Ambassador Williams.

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Congress '72--basilius

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It was an occasion tinted with mixed feelings and uncertainties from the beginning to the end. For the people of Palau, it was a God-sent opportunity to ~~the~~ greet their distinguished guests with what they claimed to be the finest expression of hospitality to be found in all of Micronesia. The other districts took it as a matter of course. For the Executive Branch of the Trust Territory government and the Congress staff, the decision to hold the final regular session of the Fourth Congress portended nightmares of logistical and communications problems which ~~was~~ no one was quite sure ~~how~~ they would turn out. However, these were unnecessary agonies, for everything was readied in time for the session through that marvelous system of somehow "muddling through" to meet deadlines. The Congress itself, despite the expansive declaration "to bring Congress to the people," could not escape the fact that its mere presence in Palau once again brought into sharp focus the fact that it had not as yet found its permanent home, a situation loaded with economic and political implications that could very well dictate Micronesia's future. Thus, the final regular session of the Fourth Congress convened ~~as~~ ^{one} as ~~was~~ cynical observer said "like a well-organized concert performed by a disorganized orchestra."

And so it was. The legislators were greeted with great pomp and ceremony. Nothing was too good or too trivial for them. District leaders, elected, traditional and those in the government, outdid each other to make the Congressmen feel at home. School children by the hundreds, armed with colorful leis and bravely worded posters demonstrated their enthusiastic welcome and support at every turn. At the airport, on the ferry ride to Koror, at the Congress chambers on opening day, and

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at the Micronesian Occupational Center for the High Commissioner's State of the Territory message--they were there with their flowers and posters.

One poster, however, was to have an ironic ~~xxx~~ message by the time the session was gaveled into history. Reading simply "Unity Now," that exhortation will perhaps haunt future Congresses; for the Fourth simply did not have enough of it. The already fragile and nebulous political front which the Congress manfully tried to maintain developed further cracks and signs of serious fragmentations as events unrolled. Let us review these events.

At the outset, the two houses showed unmistakable signs that they were to operate differently. The Senate took an early lead in disposing a number of holdover bills from the Special Session in Truk. These were largely the work of Senator Andon Amaraich of Truk whose Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations has become the most diligent and efficient working group in the upper chamber.

The House, on the other hand, perhaps because of its size, proceeded at a much slower ~~xxx~~ rate, preferring to skirt issues of substance instead of attacking them head-on as the Senate was wont to do. The rapidity with which the Senate tackled its work gave rise~~xxx~~ to the suggestion from that chamber to limit the session to a ~~thirty~~ thirty-day duration so that ample time could be devoted to consideration of the results of the Third Round of Status ~~Negotiations~~ Negotiations held in Hawaii. ~~The~~ The House did not agree and the suggestion fell through. Thus the issue which everyone expected to dominate the Congress was not taken up until the closing days of the session. It was, however, to be very much in everyone's mind and would determine the character of that session--that of "contradictory aspirations."

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From hindsight, three ~~major~~ issues can be discerned as the major areas covered by the Palau session. These were economic viability, protection of Micronesian cultures and interests, and the ~~major~~ concern for Micronesian's future political goal. These were interrelated ~~and~~ issues, and President Amata Kabua very eloquently analyzed them in one of his speeches in the Senate. "If our economic sovereignty is to be obtained, the protection of our basic interests in Micronesia must be assumed; if our legal rights and basic interests are to be protected, we must have control of our future," President Kabua told his colleagues. But in the context of that session, Micronesian interests and legal rights as seen by the members of Congress were not always the same; the phantom of contradiction kept appearing time and again to divide the delegations on these ~~basic~~ basic issues.

On the economic issue, the Congress as a whole wished to control, through legislation, the exploitation of Micronesia's natural resources and business potentials; but there were great differences ~~of opinion~~ on the methods of implementation. Most of these differences stem from what each district delegation thinks ~~thought~~ should be Micronesia's posture on the status question.

The Marianas delegation which had gone on record as desiring ~~a~~ much closer political ties with the United States expressed their desire for a correspondingly closer economic relationship with that country. The proponents of complete Micronesian independence wished to have as ~~little~~ few economic strings attached to the United States as possible. Those whose hopes still rested with "free association" ^{economic} with the United States advocated what they termed "coequal"/partnership with outside investors to tap Micronesia's resources to the benefit of both. This deliberate move to tie economic legislation to policies on the status issue was again singled out by President Kabua in his opening remarks in the Senate. Asking his colleagues to be very cautious in the formation of economic policies, President Kabua warned that, "We must insure that steps we take today do not fore-

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close the political options and alternatives of tomorrow." He emphasized that, "unless we ~~we~~ do this, when it comes time to cast or lot for the future, we may suddenly find that our chances have been limited by our previous economic choices."

The warning was not lost in the lower chamber. A proposed measure introduced by Senator Ambilos Iehsi to ^{ask} ~~request~~ the United States government for five-million dollars for low-cost housing was immediately branded ~~by~~ by House members as giving the U.S. additional strings to pull ~~in~~ in Micronesian affairs. ~~It~~ It was reduced to one-million dollars, and eventually it did not pass in either house. A bill to establish the Bank of Micronesia was welcomed as a means of breaking the monopoly which foreign banks held in each district as well as a source of securing loans for Micronesians with land as collateral as cannot be done at the present time. It was passed complete with initial funds for its operation. In an effort to bring Micronesian agriculture from the subsistence level to that of small-scale cash industries, several measures dealing with this program were adopted, ~~including~~ among them a \$25-thousand dollar grant for vocational agriculture programs and the Marpi-Kagman ~~homestead~~ homestead program to make additional lands available for farming.

Other measures dealing with economic development in the areas of boat-building, the fishing and canning industry^{ies} and dairy farming received considerable attention, and some of them are now official records of the Congress. The report of the House Committee on Resources and Development which studied in minute detail every economic ~~problem~~^{ill} in the Trust Territory and which recommends their solutions, spoke of one major theme--more monies to the people and less interference from the government.

This great burst of unity on the economic front was not all smooth sailing, However. It was all good and well when the issue was limited to sources of funds

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coming from elsewhere. But when the gut issue of dividing locally raised revenues became a subject of legislation, this spirit of cooperation dissolved into thin air. The total amount of monies which became available for appropriation by the Congress reached an all time high of over four-million dollars. Greater than half of that amount came from the Marshalls District, and the majority of that was derived from taxes collected from expatriate workers on Kwajalein atoll. This was an unexpected turn of events. Earlier, it had been speculated that the lion's share of the Micronesian taxes would be forthcoming from the Marianas District, a miscalculation that was to have political repercussions in that district and ultimately result ^{according to one theory,} in the burning of the Congress chambers on Saipan. This time the table had been turned, and the Marianas delegation was one with the other districts in desiring equal revenue sharing.

The Marshallese delegation, led by Congressman Charles Domnick, staged an embittered fight in the House to have as much of this money as possible returned to the Marshalls. Domnick introduced a bill which would return one half of all income taxes to the districts where they had been collected, a move which, if it had been successful, would have given the Marshalls ^{a more than} ~~one~~/one-million dollars share in taxes alone. The other districts, led by House Appropriation Committee Chairman Raymond Setik, argued that such a move would dangerously weaken Micronesian unity at a time when everyone was trying to build a stable government for Micronesia. Domnick countered, with his ^{Marshalls} colleagues solidly behind him, that since the monies were from taxes derived from the military complex on Kwajalein, it was only proper and just that the Marshallese, who alone have borne the most destructive activities of the U.S. military in Micronesia, should receive the greatest benefits the military has to offer. His arguments were lost on deaf ears, and as it became apparent to him and the rest of his delegation that their proposal had no chance of getting through Congress, they resorted to a most extreme measure.

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Highly incensed by this refusal, Congressman Domnick introduced another controversial measure which served notice to the other members of Congress that the Marshalls just might pull out of Micronesia ~~altogether~~ altogether. His new measure, which proposed that each district establish its own status committee to deal with its own future, was highly attractive to the Marianas delegation for obvious reasons. But here, too, the Marianas, like the other districts, was caught in a ~~dilemma~~ dilemma. To act either way was to lose immediate interests which no one was prepared to sacrifice in view of the coming Congressional elections. Eventually the Congress took the only alternative open for it. It allowed both measures to die in committees without bringing them up for a vote.

The vast sums of monies originating from Kwajalein in the form of income taxes raised another point of contradiction in what Congress desired and what it considered to be a necessary evil, at least for some time to come. ~~The issue~~ The issue involved in this was the question of fair monetary compensation and resettlement for the people of Utirik/Rongelap ~~and other islands~~ and the "mid-corridor" islands in the Marshalls. The military presence and activities on these islands was a direct cause for the displacement of these peoples and subsequent suffering from atomic fallout. On the other hand, the military and their civilian employees were generating close to one-half of the entire sum of revenues which the Congress of Micronesia appropriates. Should the Congress kick out the military and loose half of its revenue? Or should Congress choose to ignore the pleas of these long-suffering Micronesians?

The issue was not this simple--everyone realized that. But in the long run it will come to these two basic choices. In the meantime, however, Congress was more interested in immediate relief for these Marshallese, and hence it was very sympathetic to their cause.

Championing this cause, Congressman Ataji Balos delivered blistering

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speeches in the House of Representatives attacking the U.S. military for gross neglect and inadequate medical care given to his people. This has been Balos' long fight, and according to him past efforts to meet his demands have been far from satisfactory. Previously, he had threatened to lead his people to their former homes with or without the concurrence of the military. These threats had resulted in continued negotiations between both parties; but by the time the Second Regular Session of the Fourth Congress convened, another twist had been added to an already complex problem. This time, Congressman Balos and his constituents claimed that medical treatments and reports by doctors from the Atomic Energy Commission were doctored by officials at AEC to reflect favorable results instead of showing actual medical conditions of the fallout victims which were far more serious.

"I do not doubt the capabilities of these doctors the AEC sends out to the Marshalls, but I have good reason to believe that their reports are diluted substantially by others so as to be inaccurate by the time they are made public," Balos said.

With this argument clearly sold to most members of Congress, ~~Congressman~~ Balos introduced a House Joint Resolution which called for the creation of a Congressional ~~ex~~ committee to investigate the problems of the people of Utirik and Rongelap. The resolution was adopted by both houses, and Senate Vice President Olympio Borja of the Marianas was chosen as the Committee's Chairman.

The Trust Territory government received its share of attacks from Balos for not taking an active part in safeguarding the welfare of his people. Echoing a sentiment expressed in a speech earlier in the session by Speaker Bethwel Henry, Congressman Balos said in an interview: "It is difficult to see how appointed officials can presume to know the needs and desires of people whom they scarcely see at all." This apparent sarcastic reference to High Executive

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officials in the Trust Territory government was manifested in several legislative proposals which came up for consideration in both houses. Some were successful and others were not; but it is ~~unwise~~ well to review them in order to understand the disenchantment ^{which} ~~the~~ Congress has developed toward the Executive Branch.

Most significant among these measures were the Advise and Consent bill and the Trust Territory Merit System Act. These two ^{bills} were not new pieces of legislation, having been passed once by the Congress and ^{then} ~~then~~ vetoed by the High Commissioner in an earlier session. But the fact that the Congress doggedly insisted that they become laws indicated that there are serious misgivings on the present system of selecting high public officials, and the Congress wants to have its say in the selection process.

In the past, Congress ^{has} ~~has~~ always maintained that one of the basic reasons why so many public programs have not always been successful is because the officials who administered them did not know what the people wanted and needed and what they were capable of doing. As long as these officials continued to be recruited without ^{popular} rudimentary/support, no program would ever be successful, the Congress maintained. By popular support, Congress, of course, referred to its own membership, who by virtue of their elective office were supposed to know at all times what the people wanted. ^{At} At this point, while the two bills have been signed into law, everyone seems to concede that it was not the principles inherent in the two measures that were in question but rather the matter of putting them into practice at the right time which was important. Be that as it may, no one can deny the fact that Congress scored a victory over the Executive Branch on these two measures, and in so doing it had extended its power into areas which were once the exclusive domain of the High Commissioner.

Having fought successfully to make these two measures become law, it was assumed that the next logical step would be to pass a law which would make the offices of the District Administrator and his Deputy elective ones. In fact, a bill was introduced

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which would do just that, but again Congress was faced with that ~~aspect~~ contradiction between that they wish to see accomplished and what hard realities demand. There was no questioning the fact that direct election of high public officials ^{is} ~~was~~ more desirable than mere indirect consent on appointment of officials made by another official. However, the current political ~~situation~~ situation in the Trust Territory, particularly the negotiations on the status ^{an} issue, have not gone far enough to give/indication~~s~~ as to whether or not such elections would be practical or necessary at all. Thus the Congress resolved to let the matter stand as it is; the measure was allowed to die without coming to a vote.

These were but a few conspicuous events which more or less characterized the final regular session of the Fourth Congress. The question of the future political status of Micronesia was dealt with briefly by Senator Lazarus Sali and Congressman Ekpap Silk in their presentations of their Committee's report to their respective houses. The report has been published or commented upon in depth in other publications, and therefore is not treated in full in this article. It must be noted, however, that a resolution was adopted by the Fourth Congress which gave the negotiating committee a wide perimeter ^{and} "more authority to negotiate with its U.S. counterpart."

Suffice it to say then that although the status issue did not take up as much time in debates and other Congressional deliberations ^{as} ~~was~~ other issues did, its impact was felt throughout the session. ^{On} a number of occasions it became a deciding factor in determining whether or not a particular piece of legislation should pass. ^{We} ~~It~~ must wait until further rounds of negotiations have taken place before we know for sure what ultimate direction the Congress will pursue.

The session held in Palau, despite the many disagreements and contradictions which surfaced, was by far the most productive session the Congress has ever ~~had~~.

More than seventy bills and an even greater number of resolutions were
 adopted, several of which will have far-reaching effects that no one thought
 were possible as recently as two years ago. In appropriation measures alone,
 millions were made available for construction of many miles of roads into
 inaccessible areas, school buildings to be built in remote communities, boat
 channels to be blasted for isolated islands, and many other capital improvement
 projects not funded by Federal grants. In final review therefore we can conclude
 that the Second Regular Session of the Fourth Congress began with high expectations
 for unity among the six delegations, but ended just short of further fragmentation--
 a position where ^{the Congress} it was almost seven years ago when ~~the Congress~~ first ~~started~~ convened.