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# Micronesia: decision time

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This could well be a summer of decision for the people of Micronesia.

A number of meetings and other events are scheduled for this summer which will be crucial to the future of the Trust Territory's 100,000 people.

The events will take place in locations ranging from New York City to Majuro in the Marshall Islands. And they will occur at a time of unprecedented division among Micronesians themselves as to what their future should be and how it should be accomplished.

**EVENTS WHICH** make up "Micronesia Summer" include:

• The United Nations Trusteeship Council is due to meet in late May at U.N. headquarters in New York. Two basic matters are on the agenda — the trusteeship of Papua-New Guinea and the Trust Territory of the Pacific. The council will hear from a U.N. visiting mission which toured the Trust Territory in February and March how the people of Micronesia feel about the United States' administration of the 2,100-plus islands. The report should be a strong one, particularly because the mission included at one time or another representatives of the Soviet Union and China.

• A conference will be held on Majuro this week for the administrators of all six Trust Territory districts. Their future political status will be the major topic of discussion.

The Majuro conference takes on extra importance because the leaders of the American-Micronesian political status talks have agreed to address the meeting. Ambassador Franklin Hayden Williams for the U.S. side and Sen. Lazarus Saliu of Palau for the Micronesian side will discuss the progress made in six rounds of talks.

• Saliu and Williams, along with other members of the status talks committee, met informally in Honolulu last week. The purpose of the meeting was to set a date and place — probably in late August or early September in Washington, D.C.

• At those meetings, Saliu and Williams agreed that both sides would use the summer to study the crucial question of public trust lands in the districts. These lands, held in trust by the U.S., were originally seized by the Japanese during World War II. It is estimated that as much as 60 per cent of Palau, 30 per cent of the Marianas and Ponape and lesser amounts in the Marshalls, Truk and Yap are public trust lands.

When and how the lands are returned is considered highly important by many Micronesians and it is unlikely the status talks will ever be completed until the lands

question is settled.

• Williams and Saliu also agreed they would meet informally this summer to work out the details of a draft Compact of Free Association between the U.S. and Micronesia. This arrangement, which is favored by Saliu, would give the Micronesians control of internal affairs and land while leaving foreign matters and defense to the United States. The draft compact will then be offered to the full status talks.

Although Free Association retains considerable popularity, there is considerable sentiment for other kinds of arrangements.

• The Marianas, for instance, have scheduled a round of talks with the United States later this week aimed at forging close ties with the U.S.—perhaps like Guam.

Although it was not mentioned after their informal Honolulu meeting, Williams and Saliu obviously had in mind the fact that talks between the U.S. and a single group representing all of Micronesia may be a thing of the past. The Palau, Marshall and Mariana Islands districts have all considered the idea of separate talks with the United States.

AT THE SAME time, there is a serious thread of disagreement among Micronesians as to what their goals actually are. This has two sides. One is disagreement on the political future of Micronesia — whether it should be independent or allied with the United States in one form or another. The other is whether the Micronesians should try to work out a future as a unified whole or as a number of separate entities.

As Saliu once put it, the problem is that Micronesia is really only a "state of mind." It is an arbitrary administrative structure which pulls together thousands of islands, at least nine different major languages, many cultures and societies of greatly-differing degrees of development.

Williams recently told a U.S. House subcommittee that disagreement and confusion among the Micronesians is a puzzling barrier to determining a future relationship with the U.S.

"It is not easy to determine what the people of Micronesia really want," he said.

Feelings for independence run strong on Palau. The Mariana Islands are tied to Guam and see their future in close links with the U.S. The Marshalls residents make considerable money because of the presence of the U.S. military on Kwajalein and are reluctant to be automatically included with their less-affluent brothers.

In recent months, intense squabbling among political leaders in Micronesia has erupted over whether the Future Status Committee should be empowered to represent Micronesia as a whole until some kind of settlement is reached.

**ALL OF THESE** problems will take time to resolve. This summer's status talks, the meetings between Williams and Saliu, the discussions on the land question, the Marianas-U.S. talks and the meeting of administrators on Majuro should provide some answers.

For Micronesia, then, this is a summer to watch.