

Honolulu Advertiser 5/16/73

divided Micronesia

The writer, an Associate Jefferson Fellow at the East-West Center this year, is on an extensive visit to parts of the Pacific Islands and Asia.

By JERRY BURRIS
Advertiser Editorial Writer

MAJURO, Marshall Islands — Micronesians must turn toward their own "family problems" before they can go out and join the rest of the world.

This was both the general theme and final conclusion of a meeting here last week which brought together many of the Trust Territory's top administrative and political figures.

The point was made again and again in bar, restaurant and meeting room in this tiny island town: Micronesians must solve problems of land, leadership, political education and unity before they can hope to create a new political identity free of the trusteeship.

"The Micronesians just don't know what they want," said one local businessman—a Micronesiar, himself.

THE MEETING was one in a series of regular get-togethers among the administrators of the Trust Territory's six districts. In addition to the normal administrative subjects, the group this time faced the question of Micronesia's future political status.

To this end, they met with U.S. Ambassador Franklin Hayden Williams and Sen. Lazarus Saliu of Palau, leaders of the Micronesian and American delegations to the future political status talks.

Williams, told the administrators he sees lack of unity as the most crucial issue facing Micronesia today.

He urged Micronesian leaders to begin "framing their future government in order to define, among other things, the division of authority between the central government and the districts, laws on matters pertaining to land and policies with respect to collection of revenues."

In this, he pinpointed the the main issues dividing Micronesians these days:

○ Should Micronesia be a single entity, with a strong central government and a clear national identity? Or should it be a loose confederation of island districts which almost everyone agrees have as many differences as similarities?

○ What should be done about the confusing matter of land? Should public trust lands revert to original family owners—if they can be found? Or should they go to a new central government? Should old and sometimes contradictory land laws and traditions be scrapped for a simpler and more modern system?

○ Should Trust Territory revenues be divided evenly among all six districts or should those areas with the most people and money get a larger share of the central pie? This is the position taken by the Marsnalls, rich with military money.

WILLIAMS INSISTED the U.S. has no objections to the return of public lands, but added "the real question is to whom or what entity in the districts the land should be returned."

As for unity, Williams reiterated. "We continue to believe that, despite considerable cultural diversity and differing local problems and interests, a unified Micronesia would best meet the economic, social and other needs of the peoples concerned."

Yet he spoke only of the Marshall and Caroline islands, pointedly leaving out the Mariana islands. The United States is already talking to the Marianas about a separate status more closely linked to the U.S. In fact, Williams left the meeting here to begin a meeting with the Marianas status committee on Saipan.

BOTH DURING the meeting and informally afterward, Trust Territory officials complained that the Congress of Micronesia Joint Committee on Future Status has lost touch with the people of Micronesia—that the average man does not know what is going on.

Saliu, co-chairman of the Joint Committee, told the administrators his group would travel to the districts this summer to "get some direction" for the next round of talks. He said committee members would try to get the sense of the people on a proposed draft Compact of Free Association between Micronesia and the United States.

"I think the message came through very clearly," said one Trust Territory administration official. "Maybe Saliu and the rest learned a little humility and they'll try to keep more in touch in the future. After all, you have to develop grassroots support first."