

## *the Tinian issue*

Negotiations to establish a new U.S. commonwealth status for the Trust Territory district of the Marianas Islands have reached the point where final agreement is almost in sight.

As outlined in the communique following three weeks of talks in May and June, the proposed system would give the people of the Marianas much self-government, along with various benefits from Washington and a continuing place under the U.S. flag — a combination they desire.

**IN FACT**, while final terms are still to be negotiated, the Marianas agreement may have provisions that will be envied in the nearby U.S. Territory of Guam and in American Samoa, which is under more paternal rule.

And what the Marianas gets will be closely watched by the other five districts of the Trust Territory which are divided in political desires but still formally negotiating together with the U.S. for a status termed free association.

That would make them self-governing and not under the American flag but with the U.S. handling foreign affairs and defense, and helping financially.

**ALTHOUGH THE** separate Marianas talks are moving well in contrast with the years of frustrated negotiations with the rest of Micronesia, there is one delicate area that has just emerged.

That is the future of Tinian, second largest (after nearby Saipan) of the Marianas and the island where the U.S. wants to put a major military base complex.

During the recent Marianas talks on Saipan, the U.S. proposed that it acquire all of Tinian, an island of some 750 residents about the size (some 40 square miles) of Kahoolawe in the Hawaiian Chain.

The U.S. would use the northern two-thirds of the island for a joint service military base, including an airfield, harbor facility, supply and train-

ing areas. It proposes to lease the southern third of the island to present Tinian residents who would live under Marianas civilian rule.

**THE SCOPE OF** the U.S. idea was a surprise, even a shock, that brought mixed opinions. Marianas leaders have not formally replied.

The idea has various pros and cons:

On the good side, most of the U.S. military activity in the Marianas, and in most of Micronesia, would be centered in one place, minimizing land requirements. It would be away from the larger civic centers, and so potentially less damaging to island cultures.

The reason given for the U.S. buying, then leasing land back to the people of Tinian is that it would minimize problems such as prostitution, gambling, land speculation and other undesirable activities that take place in areas near U.S. bases.

On the bad side, there would be disruption for the people. Tinian was cleared for farming by the Japanese and is said not to have the traditional land tenure problems of other parts of Micronesia. The U.S. has promised to build new and better homes and government buildings. Still, property with family meaning would be taken and the island's largest village moved.

Moreover, questions will be raised over civil rights of the people even when they are under civilian rule.

**THE TINIAN BASE** problems are hardly insoluble. Most of the people of the Marianas want the economic benefits of military bases. While it would be an important base, the U.S. is not projecting major operations right away; it said plans call for only 2,500 persons on the base in the early 1980s.

Nevertheless, we will almost certainly be hearing much more about the Tinian base question as part of the concluding Marianas status negotiations and the broader question of Micronesia's future in the years ahead.