

7/16/73

Editorial

Commonwealth Status?

PAN 7/19/73

That was a historic - if largely unpublicized - meeting which took place a couple of days ago on Guam, between members of the Marianas Political Status Commission, and Governor Camacho, and leaders of the Guam Legislature.

The press wasn't invited to sit in on the discussion because of their "informal" nature, so the general public is not in a position to know exactly what was discussed. Yet, we heard that the talks were interesting and informative. They showed that there is a good deal of brotherhood between the islanders - all part of the Marianas. At first, we heard, the two sides were tentative, even timid, but later the discussion warmed up a good deal.

A great many questions, of course, remain to be answered as to the eventual political status, not only of the Northern Marianas, but of Guam as well.

The key one, in our opinion, is whether the U.S. Congress will consent to allow the formation of a Commonwealth, so remote from the United States, with a population not in excess of 12,000 people, as the Northern Marianas have. It is possible that the Defense Department, in their eagerness to get their hands on Tinian for a base, may force the issue, and may throw enough weight around State, and Interior, and the White House to get such a commonwealth passed.

Some insight into the thinking of the U.S. Congress came from Senator Paul Calvo, who just returned from visiting Congressional leaders in Washington. He made some vital points, saying: "The recent offer by Ambassador Williams to give the northern Marianas commonwealth status is subject to ratification by Congress and from the talks I had in Washington I got the distinct impression that a lot of Congressmen aren't ready to accept this proposition. To begin with there has apparently been a lack of coordination or liaison with the Congress and many of the members are not aware that creation of a new commonwealth is even being considered, let alone being talked about in the status meetings in Saipan as an 'offer'."

Calvo said: "The Congressional leaders I talked with were unanimously sympathetic about the people of Guam and the northern Marianas having a voice in determining their future political status. But when I told them that commonwealth status was under consideration they were generally unimpressed. We're going to have to do a selling job in Washington, both with the Administration and the Congress, and the only way to be effective is to work together."

Continuing Calvo said: "Even with those Congressmen who are receptive to the idea of re-examining the political status question there is a realization that any change should be coupled with the matter of reunification of the Marianas Islands. They said it was unrealistic to consider creation of two separate American political entities out of one chain of islands, particularly given the limited size of our population. The attitude is that America's presence in the western Pacific should be represented by a community including all the Marianas."

"Certainly, Calvo said, "I applaud the leaders of the northern Marianas who have brought this issue of political status to the fore. Ambassador Williams made his offer because of the continuing and insistent efforts of the people of those islands. Guam should do no less, even to the extent of petitioning the President and the Congress. I'd certainly lend my endorsement to any such petition movement but it has got to be a bipartisan effort, one supported totally by the people of Guam."

It has been true, as Senator Calvo noted, that this is no time for Guam to adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude, as expressed by some of our leaders. If Guam waits to see what happens to the Marianas, it may be too late for us to pick up any momentum. The time to move is right now. Calvo said it took men like B. J. Banzello and Francisco B. Leon Guerrero more than 20 years to get Congress to grant Guam its present status of unincorporated territory. Now in the past 20 years there have been two significant changes in our political status - we have been granted the right to elect our own governor and to seat a non-voting delegate in the Congress.

Calvo said: "I don't want another 20 years of waiting before we take another step forward. If we are going to see this issue resolved it will be because we start working now and continue until we achieve our goal. It means a lot of lobbying and a lot of working together. It means that the Legislature and the Governor of Guam have to be in close touch with our Congressional delegate. It means that the political parties of this island have to be united in wanting a new political status. And, if we are going to have reunification of the Marianas, then we are going to have to work closely and equally with our brothers in the northern Marianas."

During his stay in Washington, Calvo met with House Minority Leader Gerald Ford, Sen. J. Bennett Johnson, Rep. John Saylor, Rep. Phillip Burton, Rep. Don Clausen, all members of the Subcommittee on Territory, or Insular affairs.

In making his point even more emphatic Sen. Calvo has drawn up a resolution which he hopes to introduce in the Legislature which would petition the government of the United States to "enter into immediate negotiations with Representatives of the Government of Guam concerning the political status of the island and the possible reunification of the Mariana Islands as one American political entity."

Frankly, we admire Calvo's leadership in this matter. We don't go along either with the idea of sitting back and waiting to see what the U.S. gives the northern Marianas. We think that it's time that Guam rose up and insisted - as a long time member of the American system - on our rights to seek a new political status, hopefully in conjunction with the rest of the Marianas. The adage about a "squeeking wheel getting the grease" has a good basis in fact. It's time that Guam did some squeeking of its own instead of sitting back looking on while the U.S. makes attractive offers to the rest of this small island chain. JCM.