

Saipan's Chamber Wrestles Over Air

By Diane Maddex
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SAIPAN—The Saipan-Japan air route case—it's a subject that just won't die around here.

The normally placid Saipan Chamber of Commerce meeting yesterday erupted into a deluge of invective, quorum calls, interrupted motions, "points of information" and "points of order" over a proposed resolution putting the chamber on record in support of Continental/Air Micronesia.

After an hour's debate, the resolution was approved by a show of hands with no nays heard.

Seconds before the vote began, however, past-

president-of-the-Chamber David M. Sablan yelled "Let's go" and three other Pan American proponents followed him out the door. They were Elfriede Craddock, the Chamber's secretary; William B. Nabors, counsel to the Marianas district legislature, and Stan Torres, a Pan Am employee.

In an attempt to keep the matter from coming to a vote, Sablan and Nabors had engaged in a verbal dueling match with chamber president Ernest Milne and treasurer Joseph F. Screen, who introduced the resolution.

The measure essentially reaffirms a 1971 chamber resolution endorsing Air Mike for the route.

As he did at a recent District Legislature hearing, Sablan

questioned the legality of this earlier resolution. Nabors also questioned whether yesterday's meeting was legal and whether a quorum of chamber members was present to vote. After repeated roll calls, it was ruled that a quorum did in fact exist. Sablan also suggested that Chamber members should disqualify themselves from voting if they had any interests with any of the airlines competing for the route that would pose a conflict.

"I think we're all adults here, we're all business men and women who know what we want," said Milne in desperation at trying to call the meeting to order.

While the motion to approve the Air Mike resolution was on the floor, a substitute motion

was offered to refer it to an "impartial committee" and bring it up for a vote at the next meeting. The members defeated this move.

The Pan Am versus Air Mike discussion arose when Milne read a letter he had written to the chairman of the district legislature's economic committee. During the committee's public hearing on the air route, Milne's authority to speak for Air Mike on behalf of the chamber was put in doubt by the committee chairman and his testimony ordered held from the record.

"Your action to strike my testimony from the record was extremely high handed, dictatorial and such action has no place in our democratic society," wrote Milne. "I was amazed that the committee

members were so cowed by you and Bill Nabors that they raised no objection to your action.

"I protest it and will continue to protest such action every time I encounter it from one of my elected representatives."

A copy of this letter was sent to Robert Timm, chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board.

Nabors cautioned Milne against making "slanderous" statements.

Nabors later said that neither the chamber nor local politicians should ever have involved themselves in the air route case. The CAB, the expertise, he said, should make the decision.

The board is due to hear oral arguments on the route some time in November. Its decision will then be referred to the President.