



A STREET SCENE ON THE ISLAND OF LIB IN THE MARSHALLS

ANYONE 40 or older remembers the names: Truk, Saipan, the Marshalls, Marianas, Carolines — but after World War II, their significance faded until, by the mid-Sixties, they were as remote as landmarks on the moon.

Micronesia, some 2000 islands administered by the U.S. under a U.N. trusteeship, seemed asleep during most of that time. Little attention was paid to it, little money paid into it. But in 1967, there was a definite stirring. Micronesians reminded the U.S. of a commitment to let Micronesians shape their own future. The reminder came at an embarrassing time, and one that has not become less embarrassing in the intervening years. Now, in 1973, Micronesia is as much where it was politically as it is geographically.

Many conferences have come and gone. Stacks of position papers have been written in Washington and in the islands. And the Micronesians, once eager to work with the Americans, are angry and fed up. Their own ranks are splintered. Prospects for a happy settlement are gloomy.

Why?

Both sides face dilemmas.

Self-Determination

The United States has been formally committed to the concept of self-determination for all peoples since the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, and was informally committed long before that. That suggests a policy of giving the Micronesians what they want.

Yet the United States has — or the Administration believes the U.S. has — a growing military interest in Micronesia. And that interest has been considered by the last two administrations to be incompatible with Micronesian independence.

The Dilemma Of Micronesia

By Eugene B. Mihaly

The current military interest in the territory has two elements. First, denial of Micronesian lands and waters to other great powers. Second, bases. The Department of Defense wants to build two or three more installations in the territory and keep the missile test site on Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands.

The rationale: we need these western outposts in a period when our bases on the Asian mainland and the major offshore states — Japan, Philippines, Taiwan — are being eliminated or curtailed for diplomatic reasons.

The Administration, in other words, wants assurance that change in the political status of Micronesia does not open the door to others or close it to the U.S.

The dilemma on the Micronesian side is the cost of limited affluence. The U.S. spending program begun in 1961 has reached the annual level of over \$700 per person — higher than the per capita income of Mexico. The money has gone to build, in relative terms, one of the world's larger bureaucracies — 5000 government employees out of a population of 100,000. It has not gone to build self-sustaining enterprises which that bureaucracy might usefully guide and which could support the bureaucracy through taxation. Civil servants constitute almost all job holders. The regulators, as a result, outnumber the regulated. The territory has a sizable middle class with the tastes and spending patterns of its American counterpart. And

all this is supported entirely by the United States.

AT THE same time, the Micronesians would really like to be independent. They have no particular interest in sticking with the United States. They do have a desire to run their own affairs. But they know that a divorce now and in the foreseeable future would be an economic calamity. They have therefore tried to come up with some kind of arrangement that would offer the maximum degree of self government, but assure a continued American economic commitment.

'Uppy' Micronesians

It has to be said that the Micronesians have seen the problem more clearly than the U.S. administrations they have been talking to. The official American reaction, when the Micronesians tried to start a dialogue, has been to imply that Micronesian politicians were being uppity.

As the French did in Algeria, we attempted to argue that the wave of decolonization and nationalism that has swept Africa and Asia did not apply in Micronesia. The argument was thin, and the attempt was futile, largely because the Micronesians built up steady pressure in Washington, at the United Nations (to which the U.S. is formally answerable for its efforts to move Micronesia toward self-determination), and in Micronesia. There, violence finally erupted as the negotiations dragged on through the years without apparent result.

The Micronesian leadership decided early on that the best possible arrangement — one that would deal with their dilemma and Washington's — was something new called "free association." This is a relationship between a large state and a small one that recognizes the sovereignty of the junior partner but turns over responsibility for foreign affairs and defense to the senior partner. The word "free" reflects the open door: either partner can back out at will. Some kind of subsidy usually goes with the deal. At present, the examples of free association are New Zealand with the Cook Islands, and Britain with six states in the Caribbean.

The Micronesians proposed such an association to the United States at the end of the Sixties. Washington shied away from this new idea and countered with various plans that would have amounted to de facto annexation. The Micronesians declined and independence talk became more common in the islands.

In 1971, the President appointed F. Haydn Williams, president of the San Francisco based Asia Foundation, to take charge of the talks. Williams succeeded in getting the Department of Defense to clarify its requirements in Micronesia. That was a vital first step.

HE THEN SLOWLY moved the U.S. position closer to the Micronesians' proposal of free association. His plan included safeguards for three sets of military installations in the territory, even if Micronesia eventually decided to go its own way. The pace of American movement, however, produced new problems. With time and an absence of positive results, dissension developed on the Micronesian side.

In 1972, the Marianas group decided to make a separate deal with the United States, and the two parties are now close to settlement. The result will probably be some kind of commonweath arrangement — a permanent link to the United States. This break-off has heightened separatist feelings in the other districts of the territory, and made it even harder to get a consensus within the Congress of Micronesia's negotiating arm, the Committee on Future Political Status.

To complicate matters more, any deals the United States negotiators work out with the Micronesians have to be approved by the U.S. Congress and the U.N. Security Council.