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Editorial

...In Good Faith....

It is a grand start, indeed. That is the news that U.S. Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams and the Congress of Micronesia's Joint Committee on Future Status have reached agreement on the basic principles relating to the transfer of title to Micronesian public lands to the districts of Micronesia.

This transfer of land could go a long way to dispel feelings that some Micronesians have had that the U.S. wasn't negotiating in good faith in their dealings with the Micronesians.

Now the status talks can proceed in earnest. The present negotiations are aimed at formulating a new relations of free association between Micronesians and the United States under which they would be responsible for their own internal affairs and the U.S. would be responsible for their foreign affairs, and defense.

With the land question resolved, the next step apparently will be the formation of a constitutional convention, one that is expected to be held before next July. A new constitution would represent a further step towards self-government, and would provide a practical blueprint for the post-trusteeship era.

It appears as though the Micronesians are moving ahead towards the yet-to-be defined "free association" status which is sort of a cross between total independence and commonwealth. As yet unexplained in the total picture is the financial contribution that the U.S. will make to the Micronesians.

There have been some elements of mistrust in the Micronesian people ever since the so-called "Solomon Report" was disclosed some years ago, a document which purportedly called for the "Americanization" of Micronesia, suggesting the use of Peace Corps volunteers in this regard.

Another problem has been the obvious need for military land retention, as the U.S. moves back from Asia to a second line of defense, a line which includes some Micronesian bases. Unfortunately, the Defense Department, until recently, has not been able to pin-point their land requirements for the future. And even after they did pin-point them, the Palau islanders weren't happy with the requirements there, nor did the people of Tinian and the Northern Marianas take kindly to the heavy handed move of the military to take over all of Tinian.

The worst problem of all, though, has been the separationist movement by the Marianas. One Senator, John Mangefel of Yap, was reported as saying in a news release that he has grave doubts about the sincerity of the U.S. in its dealings over Micronesian status. While Mangefel is a self-professed advocate of free association, he has been particularly troubled by the separate talks with the Marianas.

He said: "I have nothing against the people of the Marianas for trying to get a different status. They have that right. I do blame the United States for encouraging and carrying on these talks at this time. It has broken the unity of Micronesia, and though will never be the same again."

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"I am forced to point out that it is the United States of America we are bargaining with," Mangelstiel continued. "They fought a civil war over their own. Now they are encroaching upon the rights of Micronesia. Apparently they believe in things like the word 'process' and unity only for themselves, and not for other people and nations."

"The separate negotiations worry me. They have influenced me to change my mind. I have always gone to the bargaining table with the rest of the committee with a clear mind and a clear conscience. I felt I was doing the best job I could for the people of Micronesia, and at the same time trying to understand what America's needs and plans are for the future. I have always thought I was dealing in good faith, honestly, with no tricks up my sleeve, or secret plan to gain advantage. Now, I am beginning to distrust what the other side is saying--and that is a very bad feeling to have with you when you are at the bargaining table. It affects everything if you feel you can't trust what the other person is saying. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps I should change my definition of good faith to mean that I should say one thing, and then do the other, that I should have a secret plan to trick the U.S.--perhaps I am just being too honest," Mangelstiel concluded.

A final sore point in the eyes of some of the Micronesian leaders is the fact that the U.S. government is reportedly deliberately withholding a political education program from the people of Micronesia--according to a charge by Sen. Lazarus Sali of the Status Committee. According to Sali the program was produced by Carl Heine, former staff member of the Joint Status Committee, who went to work for Public Affairs with the express purpose of creating such a program.

However, Sali has recently learned that before the material was released, it was reviewed by several people in the Administration, and then sent to Washington for review. According to the Friends of Micronesia Heine said that the program received tentative approval by High Commissioner Edward Johnston, who they say was "unaware of Washington's intent to suppress the program, and was sharply criticized by Williams for having given approval."

The U.S. response to Sali's charges is that it is merely reviewing the materials. According to Heine, and the Friends of Micronesia, the U.S. has now decided to have a team of U.S. Information Agency specialists design and implement a political education program.

We don't know all the facts concerning this political education hassle, but it is apparent to the most casual outside observer that in the past there has been no political education program, and if there is to be such a program, it has to be developed by the Micronesians themselves--not the American Information specialists--to make it effective. That in itself will not be easy, considering the diversity of the views of the Micronesians.

Call it blind patriotism or what you will, but most of us living on Guam, still have faith in the sincerity of the United States. It's too bad they can't convey that same impression to the Micronesians. Perhaps a few more above the board decisions like the one about the land return would help. JCM.

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