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Editorial

Political Blackmail?

Webster's Dictionary says that blackmail is a tribute paid to freebooters and bandits along the Scottish border...and the extortion of such payments...to coerce...as by threats.

We suspect that it is all in the way you look at political blackmail, but in some ways both the Micronesians, and the Japanese come dangerously close, both co-incidentally, accounts of which were in yesterday's Daily News.

Let's take the Japanese first. Quite naturally, the Japanese, who have no oil of their own are in a state of tension unequalled by anything since Hircshima. They have been caught in the great Arab oil squeeze. Currently they import 83 percent of their oil from the Persian gulf states, and cutbacks have already forced Japan's major industries such as automobile, steel, cement and electrical to cut oil consumption by 10 percent. This obviously could slow, or even stop Japan's on-rushing economy.

The Arabs, using oil as a major new weapon, said that unless Japan moved a step closer to the Arab position, that is having Japan reconsider its stand towards Israel, the Arabs would not exempt Japan from their oil boycott.

At first the Japanese hedged, and voted \$5 million for the Palestinian refugees, partially because they do considerable business with Jews around the world, and secondly because no nation likes to be blackmailed.

But, business before pleasure. Oil before integrity. Japan has bowed to the Arab pressures and told Israel that she had to give up all the territories she won in the 1967 Middle East war, and warned that if the Jewish state refused the Tokyo government would "reconsider" its relations with Jerusalem.

Frankly, we don't know if we really blame the Japanese. They are being realistic. They don't really have any other choice, like the U.S. does. Simply, the economic life of Japan depends upon Mid-East oil. Without it they are dead as a nation. All the talk about integrity, and principle doesn't seem to matter when it comes time for a full belly, and a car to drive to work.

Now let's take a look at the Micronesians, whose negotiations with the United States in Washington ended abruptly on notes of regret by both sides that they were unable to get together on the question of how much money the Pacific islands could expect under their proposed "free association" agreement with the United States.

To the uninformed, say a bricklayer in Lima, Ohio, or a Congressman from Oklahoma this could sound like a form of blackmail too. All they can hear is "Hey Baby, give me \$100 million bucks a year, and we won't opt for independence. We'll be on your side!"

The talks ended without any real attempt at a compromise figure. U.S. Ambassador Hayden Williams said that the U.S. was firm in its refusal to accept the approximate \$80 to \$100 million package (per year) that the Micronesians requested, and urged that the talks detour around this issue, and move to complete the draft of the compact document.

The Micronesians have been getting about \$60 million a year, although the total figure was somewhat less than that this year. They asked for about \$100 million a year for the first 10 years of the compact—plus the continuation of the existing federal programs for Micronesia. The U. S. figure has been closer to \$40 plus postal, weather and federal airport services. The U.S. spokesmen made the point that the figure would not have to be as high as the current level because there would be no Trust Territory government support there.

Sen. Lazarus Salii, head of the Micronesian negotiating team, apparently offered an \$80 million package, which Williams also found too high. Williams said in a statement closing the round that "...our positions are very wide apart." Salii charged that "The United States delegation has been unwilling to make any significant improvement in its offer. We on the other hand have been willing to reduce our request by \$20 million annually and to accept a significant diminution in the federal programs offered without compensation subsequent to termination of the trusteeship."

Again, there are two sides here, and both have valid points. It isn't, as our bricklayer friend would assume, that the Micronesians are holding a gun to the United States. As Salii points out, the proposed compact "would commit the government of Micronesia to allow a virtual U.S. domination of Micronesian foreign affairs and the liberal use of Micronesian territory for U.S. security purposes." This arrangement, Salii said, is worth more money than the U.S. is offering. In effect it would keep any other government such as Japan, or Russia, out of large areas of the Pacific, keeping the Pacific a virtual U.S. lake.

Williams, conversely, makes a point when he said that Micronesia was seeking a sum of money that would make it more dependent on the U. S. than it is now, rather than give it the independence it is bargaining for.

Our only surprise is that the talks ended so abruptly, rather than recessed to allow serious contemplation of the problems, and to allow possible compromises. We would think that if the Micronesians went down \$20 million they might be willing to back off just a bit more, and we would think that the U.S. could go up at least \$20 million. The correct figure, under our assumptions, would be in the range of \$60 million a year—or just about what the Micronesian government operated on last year.

With such a reasonable compromise we could finally terminate the unwieldy trusteeship, and yet retain effective diplomatic and military control over the islands.

What are the options? Certainly, the Micronesians will now push strongly for full independence, at which time they would seek aid and assistance from other Pacific nations, and the U.S. could lose its strong position in the Pacific.

We too have to express disappointment in having the talks end so soon. We hope that reasonable men can get together again soon to resolve these knotty questions. JCM.