

LOSERS

The results of the elections for the Micronesian Constitutional Convention are in and the declared winners in Palau are Johnson Toribiong and Santos Olikong for District One; John Olbedabel and Jacob Sawaichi for District Two; and Tosiwo Nakamura for District Three.

The real winner, however, is the Progressive Party which won three of the five delegate seats (Olbedabel, Sawaichi, and Nakamura) allotted to Palau.

The Progressive Party, which polled only 18% (1,271) of the total votes (7,897), is still celebrating their victory and talking about a resurgence of popular support for its candidates in future elections. However, seen against the configuration of delegate districts in Palau, it was obvious from the start the Progressive Party was guaranteed to win the two seats in District Two where it has always enjoyed the support of the majority of its voters.

The unexpected winner for the Progressives was Nakamura in District Three (Peleliu, Angaur, and Southwest Islands). Both Peleliu and Angaur, considered to be a Liberal stronghold, went decisively Progressive and the Liberal Party are now blaming what insiders consider "The party's unattractive candidate and weak campaign." The real losers, though undeclared, are the people of Palau and

sensation is the election of Sawaichi who got only 415 votes in District Two while Minoru Ueki and Yoich Kohama, who each received 829 and 479 votes respectively in District One, are not delegates.

Senator Salii, on the other hand, lost in the elections in that he had personally handpicked, against the advice of his party's seasoned pros, the Liberal Party's candidates in Districts Two and Three, who all lost the election. As a result the Liberals, who have dominated the politics in Palau for the last ten years, are now a minority among the Palau's elected delegates and some party members are fuming mad at Salii who is thought to have put his personal liking over the interest of the party and Palau.

Salii, who only came to Palau before the campaign got started, is reported to have insisted that he preferred as his party's candidates the "controllable" and specifically instructed his party to shy away from those candidates who he considered "uncontrollable."

"We acquiesced to his insistence and look at what we got," said one party source. "For the first time we are a minority and moreover Salii will have to deal with Olbedabel who is more than his political enemy."

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the Bank of Hawaii to purchase the boat.

A campaign of unfounded rumors and innuendoes according to observers, was the order of the day and got worse towards the election time. For example, one story had it that elder Basilius had disowned his son, Bonifacio Basilius, who was an independent candidate in District Two. Food, booze, and cigarettes flew freely in the villages and movies were free village after village.

In the end, the elections, which by law were meant to be non-partisan, became another popularity contest between the Progressive and Liberal Parties with both party's machines in full swing on behalf of their candidates.

The Progressive Party followed tradition and endorsed to perennial candidates, Olbedabel and Sawaichi in District Two and Nakamura in District Three, forcing another candidate, also a member of the party, to declare:

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Losing candidates Luke Bekemekmad and Yoich Kohama, who had previously been identified with the Progressive Party, were left to their own device in District One. The defeat for Bekemekmad was crushing as he had staked his political future with the Progressive and was the campaign manager for Sawaichi during his recent unsuccessful try at the Koror's mayoralty. The Progressives promised him 800 or so solid party votes and Bekemekmad thought that he would have only to attract a few independent and Liberal votes to win a seat. However, as it turned out on election day, the Progressives did not deliver their promise and Bekemekmad went down to a crushing defeat.

The Liberals, who at the outset had planned to play it by the rule and balked at endorsing and campaigning for any candidate, eventually, at Sali's insistence, endorsed and went in force to back up his candidates (Toribiong and Olikong in District One; Frank Azanuma and Ichiro Moros in District Two and Mitsuo Solang in District Three). The elections were not devoid of surprises. Perhaps, the biggest surprise was the landslide victory of Toribiong who finished at the top in District One with 1,485 of

preferred as his party's candidates the "controllable" and specifically instructed his party to shy away from those candidates who he considered "uncontrollable."

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The same source said that Sali's list of the "uncontrollable" candidates included Bonifacio Basilius, Victorio Ucherbelau and Francisco Uludong.

The constitutional convention elections were, for all practical purposes, a lackluster, non-election election, as there was no real debate or discussion on the issues among the candidates. And it appears from the list of candidates that some just drew their hats into the ring for a political ride.

In District Two, instead of the precon issues being the focus of the campaign, the pep talks among the voters centered on the Modekngai Learning Center, a community-oriented school funded by Janss Foundation of California and being built by the Modekngai at Ibobang, and a sleek double-engine boat owned by Timothy Olkeriil, a congressman and manager of the Palau Modekngai Company, Inc.

A story spread like brushfire in District Two that Olkeriil had taken the company's money to purchase the boat and the shareholders were not aware of it. Olkeriil, contacted, denied the story and said that he obtained a loan from

majority of its voters.

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The real losers, though undeclared, are the people of Palau and Senator Lazarus Sali, the chairman of the Joint Committee on Future Status, and his Liberal Party.

Delegate districting in Palau, as decided by Public Law No. which created the Micronesian Constitutional Convention, was rigged along party lines and had no basis in equal representation. District One (Airai, Koror, Aimeliik, and Ngetpang), which accounts for 3,171 eligible voters was allotted two seats while District Two (Ngechesar Melekeok, Ngiwal, Ngarard, Ngercheleng, Kayangel, Ngardmau and Ngeremlengui) in which there are only 1524 eligible voters was also given two seats. District Three (Peleliu, Angaur and the Southwest Islands) with 564 registered voters was given one delegate.

The actual voter turnout indicates clear unequal representation and just downright under-representation in the Palau delegation to the convention--18% are represented by three Progressive delegates and 47% are represented by two Liberal delegates while 35%, who voted for independent candidates, are not represented at all.

An example of such under-repre-

PEOPLE & SALLI — LOSERS

the 4,453 votes cast. It was his first time and he was gone most of the time during the campaign, leaving his campaigning to his two uncles, Senator Roman Tmetuchl and Baules, Sechel long and the Liberal Party. Most observers attributed his victory to the belief that he is riding on the popularity of his senator uncle and his deceased father. He is however to be watched in the future.

Another surprise was the voting turnout in the Southwest Islands. All the votes cast went to their favorite son, Mariano, Carlos who campaigned that since his people are culturally different from the rest of Palau, they ought to have their own representative at the convention.

The biggest lesson perhaps to be learned from the last elections by the politicians and hopeful office seekers is that the two major parties are losing their hold among the voters in Palau. The 35% of the voters who left the parties to

vote for independent candidates presents a sharp, unprecedented rise in political awareness among the voters. It is also a measure of the political dissatisfaction and disillusionment of the voters towards the two political parties.

"I sensed a real disenchantment by the people against the two parties, even by many people in Desbedall (eastern Babeldaob) towards the Progressives," reported Francisco Uludong, who ran as an independent but unsuccessful candidate in District Two. "Such expressions as 'The party systems are alien and ruining Palau' and 'The parties are just devices whereby the politicians and the businessmen can continue to divide and win our support for political offices' were common in the beginning of the campaign but the people seemed to forget as the campaign heated up and get as the campaign heated up and towards the election time."

The complaint that the parties

were only fronts for the business establishment seems credible in the fact that both parties are controlled and bankrolled by the local businessmen. In fact, a liberal party member, who is one of the biggest businessmen in Palau, commented on the election results:

"Although the Liberals lost in District Two, the businesses still have a good representative in Sawaichi."

Sawaichi ran as a candidate of the Progressive Party and his campaign was managed by Belhaim Sakuma an upcoming businessman who owns the Micronesian Divers and is treasurer of the Palau Shipping Company a conglomerate of the big businesses in Palau.

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