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TO: J. S. Williams, San Francisco

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FROM: Status LNO Saipan

Political Education Needed In Islands

In the year immediately ahead the people in the Northern Marianas will be bombarded with "political education" programs. Such programs are now spreading throughout the rest of Micronesia as well, as the islanders begin the long and tedious process of exploring their political future. Although status, and land questions have been a big conversational subject for many years, much of the momentum of the matter have been handled by the island leaders. Now a continuing, on-going effort will be made to get everybody involved.

When the end of the negotiations near for the Marianas, monies are being set aside for this political education program. It won't be easy, because there is a basic question of who funds the informational program, and who determines what the answers are going to be. If the U.S. government, for instance, puts up the money for the informational effort, should they then also be entitled to help determine the content of the material? Conversely, if there is opposition to the proposed agreement - and we assume there is - then are the opponents also allowed to distribute "information" in disagreement, and who shall pay for that?

Just recently Pedro T. Nakatsukasa, veteran Saipan councilman, strongly criticized the information program already established, the Education-for-Self Government (ESG) program, calling it "one of the greatest failures affecting the people of the municipality (of Saipan). He made the point that few on the island really knows what the commonwealth status is all about. Another Saipanese councilman Dino Jones raised some interesting questions earlier along the same line.

Nakatsukasa said: "I don't know what commonwealth is. I don't know what free association is. I don't know what independence is," adding, "I can only imagine the depth of the lack of knowledge on the part of the great majority of our people who are not holders of public office." He said that he is not sure that he would like to be a part of the U.S. "if the military could take my land for their bases, or if the men and women in the U.S. Congress who have never been here and do not know our needs and desires could pass laws which affect all of us without our being represented in that body."

The Saipan councilman said: "I think that I would like to see us part of the U.S. if the people of the Marianas in an association with other districts of Micronesia could have the freedom which we all want, if we are to be economically secure and possessors of a healthy economy and if we find that we do not like our future status relationship we can get out of it."

What he seems to be saying is that the U.S. should simply go away and leave them alone - but please send money. We're not sure it works quite that way. Anybody who wants complete economic security is going to have to give up some freedoms - and that is true for Americans as for anyone else.

Certainly, over the years the negotiators from the Marianas have worked diligently for a better deal for the islanders, not a worse deal. The trouble will come in trying to explain this to the people of the Marianas.

Councilman Jones asked a number of questions recently, to give you an idea of what the people of Saipan are thinking. He said:

"With commonwealth, who will have first preference for jobs? Americans or Marianas citizens?"

"Can we control immigration...or will we become a minority population on our island?"

"Can we really keep other Americans from owning land in the Marianas?"

"Will we be able to vote for president, or will we be second-class citizens like the people of Guam?"

"Will we have a delegate in the U.S. Congress? Or will we be a non-voting delegate?"

"If the U.S. Congress decides to put us together with Guam after we join the U.S., will we be able to stop it if the majority of people were against it?"

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"These are important questions, and ones that do have answers, although the answers may not please all of the people. To the average American some of the questions are so intimidating, you almost feel like just pulling up stakes, stopping all payments, and letting the islanders revert back to a coconut economy." After all, in the Marianas Agreement, the U.S. Government is talking about sending many millions of dollars to the Marianas every year, an average per capital of close to \$3,000 a year. They should get something for their money. Politics is a two way street. You give some, and you get some. It sounds like some of the Saipanese councilmen want to just receive.

We on Guam also resent the Saipanese when they keep referring to Guamanians as "second class citizens." We don't feel that we are. After all, we are Americans, and are free to move to other parts of the country if we don't like Guam. Secondly, we are working on the vote for president, and we believe we will have it before too many years pass. After all, the people living in Washington, D.C. only received the presidential vote a few years ago. Were they too "second class citizens?"

Certainly all of the vital issues, such as immigration, land ownership by Americans, business interest by the Americans, have all been discussed thoroughly by the Marianas Delegation, and answers to these questions should be made available. When one of the councilmen stands up and asks what the differences between commonwealth, free association, and independence is, we wonder if the people of Saipan have been living in a vacuum for the past six years.

Certainly, the people of the Marianas - and all of Micronesia - should have all the answers. After all, they are going to have to vote on the question of Commonwealth or Free Association. Nobody is going to shove this down their throats. Their vote will be the ultimate decision maker. It all points out, though, the importance of the political educational programs just now underway. Marianas District Administrator Francisco C. Ada stressed "political education at the grass-roots level," in a speech opening the municipal council. It should develop into one of the major programs - and problems - in the year immediately ahead. But, like we said, it won't be easy. JCM.