

Hecklers 'Stone' Anticovenant Group

By Guadalupe C. Borja
Daily News Staff Writer

SALPAN — Saipan's anticovenant group was heckled and pelted by rocks during a campaign meeting in Chalan Kanoa's District 2 Monday night.

Pro-and anticovenant groups have been holding Saipan-style — raised voices and emotional tones — political rallies the past week on the covenant proposing U.S. commonwealth status.

Voters will decide the issue June 17.

Using loudspeakers which carried their voices several hundred feet, Congress of Micronesia Rep. Oscar Rasa; Dino Jones of the Saipan Municipal Council; Juan Demapan, former Saipan Municipal Council member; Ben Fitial of the United Carolinian Association (UCA) and David Sablan, a San Antonio businessman, pointed out in Chamorro, the "disadvantages" of the covenant as "Friends For The Commonwealth," a pro-covenant group, had its own rally less than a mile away.

Stressing that a "no" vote in June does not mean rejection of U.S. commonwealth status, the 27-year-old freshman congressman told the crowd of about 40 that the covenant signed in February between the Marianas Political Status Commission and U.S. representatives "does not offer maximum benefits to the people."

Rasa, one of two commission members who did not sign the documents, said the

\$14 million annual U.S. support guaranteed for the first seven years of commonwealth would not be adequate to operate the proposed Marianas government. The islands would need \$30 million annually, he said.

Rasa said a minimum wage system should be established for both the government and private sectors, but later said the federal minimum of \$2.30 an hour should not be applicable in the islands because most of the population works for the government. A minimum wage of possibly "three times the present 61 cents" an hour should be established, he said.

The covenant does not provide for a federal minimum wage system.

Under the proposed commonwealth, Rasa added, free medical care would not be available and people would pay "\$10 just for a phone call to a doctor."

Jones told the crowd that under the present United Nations trusteeship, with the U.S. as administrator, the Northern Marianas have "two recourses: the U.S. and the U.N."

Under commonwealth, he argued, "We'll have only one recourse: the U.S." "The effects of the June election will be permanent, and will affect future generations," he added.

Demapan asked, "What government system will we have if the Marianas are administered separately after the June plebiscite and U.S. Congress rejects the covenant?"

After the plebiscite a secretarial order is to state that the Northern Marianas will be administered separately from the rest of the Trust Territory (TT). At the same time, the covenant will be reviewed by U.S. Congress.

The drafting of a constitution by Marianas voters and a review of it by the U.S. Congress are additional steps that must be taken before the Northern Marianas becomes a commonwealth, a status tentatively scheduled for 1981 when the trusteeship ends.

Fitial said the covenant provision on U.S. eminent domain means that "U.S. will have control over our lands."

The 63-year-old Sablan, who said he does not like speaking on political issues but felt compelled to do so on the covenant, asked: "Shall we give up our lands at a cheap price for the American citizenship we want so dearly?"

Under the covenant, a Northern Marianas commonwealth would receive \$19,520,600 for a 50-year lease — with the U.S. having the option to renew for another 50 years — of about 7,000 hectares on Tinian and 72 hectares on Saipan and the use of uninhabited Farallon de Medenilla as a target range.

It was during Sablan's speech that police were called when a seated listener was hit on the shoulder with a rock and other rocks were thrown on the roof of Sylvester Torres's house. The Torres front yard was the speaking area for the rally.

Sablan, who returned to the

microphone saying jokingly that he "was still alive," said the U.S. "wants our lands to store nuclear arms." He said the covenant does not provide U.S. "protection" for the people of the Northern Marianas in case of a nuclear war.

Sablan, also a former Saipan Municipal Council member, said the U.S.'s sudden interest in "our lands" is due to its failure in Indochina. He charged that the U.S. did nothing for the islands in their more than 25 years as a U.S. trust territory.

He said the proposed "no" vote on the ballot—which the UCA has criticized to the U.S. Department of the Interior/as "misleading" — is a "scare tactic by the U.S. because it knows we want American citizenship badly."

After the three-hour meeting, Rasa said the anticovenant group, which had no name before, now will be known as "Friends For A Better Commonwealth."

Estimating that 2,000 voters will reject the covenant in June, Rasa said a "nonprofit organization" will show the Northern Marianas population that it can get better governmental services from it than from the proposed commonwealth.

More than 5,000 are expected at the polls in June.

With plans to continue participating in the Congress of Micronesia "as observers," the proposed group will solicit assistance from various sources, governments and groups, Rasa said.