

## Letters to the Editor

### Marianas Plebiscite

To the Editor:

As Plebiscite Commissioner in the recent voting in the Marianas I naturally had to maintain strict neutrality on the issues being decided. But The Times' editorial convictions and a letter on Aug. 15 from Professor James W. Gould, impel me to add a word.

The United States is committed to completing its trusteeship obligations in Micronesia by helping the people to an acceptable political status. We cannot let the trusteeship run on indefinitely. Surely we must also respect the wishes of the people of Micronesia. A start has been made with the long and careful negotiation of commonwealth status with the people of the Northern Marianas. When equally careful negotiations are completed with the people of the other five districts in Micronesia, they too should be consulted and their wishes respected, whatever they turn out to be, if they are consistent also with the best interests of the United States, and with our trusteeship obligations.

My job was to see that it was a free and fair election in the Northern Marianas. I worked very hard, in particular, to see that the opposition to the Commonwealth Covenant had every opportunity to campaign, that the registration of voters was fair to both sides, and that the voting and counting were honest. Even the opponents campaigned not against commonwealth status, but for "a better commonwealth." We registered over 90 per cent of the estimated eligible voters, and about 95 per cent of them actually cast ballots. There was abundant evidence of voter awareness of the issues.

Professor Gould says that Ambassador Williams' letter to The Times gave the impression that the plebiscite was "internationally and impartially supervised." I did not get any such impression from the letter, but it was certainly observed very carefully by the U.N. Mission which came out to see exactly how it was conducted. Their report will speak for itself.

I have a deep affection and admiration for the people of the Northern Marianas. I believe we should respect their wishes.

ERWIN D. CANHAM  
Boston, Aug. 18, 1975

The writer is Editor Emeritus of The Christian Science Monitor.

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