

Pipe Dreams

By Joe Murphy



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No way.

The question is: Can Micronesia have a self-supporting government by the end of the trusteeship?

A team of experts from the U.N. headed by Robert Trusk is supposedly looking into how the Micronesians can be put down the road towards economic independence. Trusk has worked in 31 different nations. He sees potential in TT fishing, agriculture, small scale manufacturing and tourism. Fish canning, copra and fruit processing, he says, has proved to make a successful economic base in the Cook islands.

Trusk also reported that the Marianas Island district was not included in the economic study project at the request of the U.S. government, which presumably has other plans.

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The trouble is that the islanders of Micronesia have been living a lot higher than those of the Cook Islands. I mean in such things as salaries, cars, etc. And it gets to be very hard to go backwards in life style.

You've got to remember that the total income for the T.T. this last year was only about \$5,000,000, of which about \$4,000,000 was in taxes. Of this about \$1,700,000 was paid by non-Micronesians.

Then you must also remember that in both 1973, and 1974 the T.T. government spent about \$80 million each year. So, you wind up with a gap of roughly \$75,000,000 between what is coming in, and what is going out.

And the development people, in their dreams, hope to turn that kind of deficit around in the next five years?

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Don't get me wrong. I'm not blaming the Micronesians, who have been hamstrung at every turn by the U.S. government, who aren't sure what they want. It wasn't until last year that other foreign nationals could even invest in Micronesia if they wanted to.

And the U.S. has maintained bases in Kwajalein, and Eniwetok, plus huge gobs of land in other places without paying out any bread for their use.

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It isn't a matter of the U.S. not encouraging outside capital, but rather in downright discouraging it.

The Micronesians can take a little of the blame for the lack of revenue themselves, because they believe that a nation can develop internally, without the use of outside capital. In other words, they don't want any Americans, or Japanese, or whatever, around because they think that they can do it themselves. No way.

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The U.S. hasn't helped a bit by developing a fishing industry, or by developing some cash crop agriculture, or by developing a solid boat building industry, or even by developing tourism.

If there is any shame or stigma attached to the 30 plus years of American rule it shows right there in the budget. Five million income. Eighty million outgo.

Just building the Micronesians a new capital center isn't going to help much, either, because they'll have to have money to staff it, and keep the lights on.

The Americans were so afraid that the Micronesians wouldn't depend on them anymore, they got them used to a cash, steak and beer economy, when what they really should be doing is getting them ready for a taro and tuba economy.

The Congress of Micronesia release says "One of the primary goals of the (development) plan is to establish a self-supporting government for Micronesia regardless of whatever future political status is chosen."

In the process the plan will also indicate ways of reorganizing the government to lower costs.

I hate to be critical, but the only way the Micronesians are going to pick up that \$75 million would be to lease Truk to the Soviet Union, the Marshalls to the U.S., and Palau to the Japanese.

Copra isn't going to do it. Tourism without the Marianas isn't going to do it. Fishing, at this stage, without a fishing fleet, a market, or trained fishermen isn't going to do it. Agriculture would take many years to develop. They may be able to bring in some money by leasing out part of their ocean to the Japanese, Koreans, or Chinese, but it won't be enough.

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Our main failure was not recognizing from the beginning that the Micronesians had no wish to be Americans. For 30 years we've taught them, through example, through college education in the U.S., through education, to live like the Americans, with their motor cars, motorcycles, washers, canned food, beer and booze. Now we've got to tell them that there is no way they can live like the Americans do, not on their little tropical islands.

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Quite naturally, even after 1981, the U.S. isn't just going to pull the plug, and let the islanders revert back to a subsistence economy. They will put up a bundle of dough for the foreseeable future, to subsidize their former wards.

I can't help but be very gloomy about the prospects in Micronesia in the years immediately ahead. Americans make very poor colonialists, indeed. Somewhere down the line somebody just assumed that the Micronesians, like the Guamanians, or Mariana islanders, would just naturally want to join the U.S. Then there would be no problem.

But they don't want to join the U.S. They want to be independent. And we did absolutely nothing to help them along in that regard. At least nothing from an economic sense. Will the Micronesians slash their government to a \$30 million level? And where will they find that other \$25 million? Interesting, but sort of sad.