

SPECULATION ON THE LETTERS FROM WASHINGTON

The latest page in the history of Micronesian-U.S. relations was written a couple weeks ago, when several Micronesian leaders received a joint letter from U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Secretary of Interior Cecil Andrus. Since these two men are the heads of two departments which have a crucial role in determining U.S. policy toward Micronesia, the letter was received with much interest--as well as some astonishment and curiosity.

The content of the letter was not that surprising. According to MNS, Vance and Andrus invited a select group of Micronesian leaders to meet with them sometime in April or May "for a full discussion on our (the U.S.-Micronesian) relationship", to try to pin down how the two countries "might best proceed with detailed negotiations on the future status of Micronesia."

However, even though the substance of the letter was fairly straight-forward, the particular group of Micronesian leaders selected to receive this letter--and those who were not selected--caused some consternation within government circles as to the real intentions of the letter. The letter was sent to the presiding officers of the Congress of Micronesia and to the Speaker of each district legislature. But conspicuously absent from the list of recipients was the Micronesia's "Commission on Future Political Status and Transition".

The Status Commission has a firm mandate from the Congress of Micronesia to represent Micronesia on all matters "which will effect early and satisfactory conclusion of the future political status negotiation and promote a smooth and orderly transition to government under the Constitution." (P. L. 6-87, sec. 9, no. 3). These kinds of topics are probably just what the Americans had in mind to talk about, judging from the Vance-Andrus letter, so it was indeed "astonishing"--as Anton Amaraich, Chairman of the Status Commission put it--that the Commission was not invited to participate in the discussions.

In fact, the Status Commission was not even mentioned in the letter. In an interview with the Micronesian Broadcasting Service, Amaraich stated: "Up to this time, the Commission was not invited to attend, participate, or comment. We do not know why. We are curious about it."

He was not the only one who was curious; many other "Washingtonologists" were speculating that this incident might be a sign of how the new Carter Administration intends to deal with Micronesia. Although there seemed to be as many different interpretations as there were interpreters, most of the speculations can be categorized into three broad theories:

THEORY ONE: "They thought they were doing the right thing." This theory goes something like this: The Americans thought it would be more proper to

write to the elected leaders of Micronesia rather than appointed negotiators. An analogy would be writing a letter to Heads of State rather than the State Department. In other words, they were just following standard diplomatic protocol.

THEORY TWO: "They wanted to do the wrong thing." According to this theory, the Americans were deliberately trying to undermine the status of the Status Commission, by omitting it from the letter. This move is part of an on-going strategy by the U.S. to keep the Micronesian negotiators off-balance, to foster disunity between the districts, and to further U.S. global interests at the expense of Micronesia.


THEORY THREE: "They didn't know what they were doing." This theory stresses the fact that Jimmy Carter's team is new on the job, and therefore relatively inexperienced. Carter promised in his campaign to bring a new spirit to American foreign policy, and now his staff is off and running--at an exhausting pace--to try to get things moving. With all this dynamism it is unlikely that all details could be attended to, and eyebrows are being raised around the world at some of the slip-ups being made. So, according to this theory, the omission was simply that: an omission.

Regardless of which of the above theories is actually valid, Micronesia's leaders can use their discretion to decide which theory would be the most advantageous to act upon. And clearly, there are differences in advantage between these three theories: for example, if the leaders choose Theory Two, they would in effect be accusing the Americans of underhandedness, which would likely lead to an escalation of the "confrontation attitude" that seems to have been forming lately. If they act upon Theory One they can let the Americans get "off the hook" gracefully, but the Status Commission will still be excluded from the upcoming discussions. Or, if they assume that Theory Three is correct, they could act upon it by having all the leaders who received the letter get together and write a single letter back to Vance and Andrus, stating that the Status Commission should be included in the discussions. By doing this they will have re-affirmed the mandate of the Commission, made a symbolic gesture of Micronesian Unity, and avoided making an "undiplomatic" accusation--all in one move.

Of course, these speculations on top of speculations is not meant to pass judgement as to which one, if any, of the three theories is really true. But actually, it doesn't really matter which one is correct, because the Vance-Andrus letter is already history. What matters now is how Micronesia's leaders react to it.

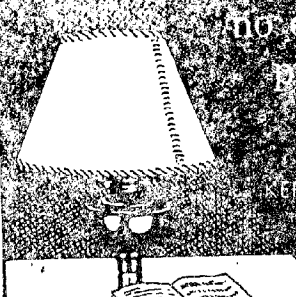
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