

Carter In For A Surprise?

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SAIPAN—President Carter may have thought he was doing Micronesians a favor by offering independence if they want it. But he and the United States may be in for a surprise.

A rallying cry for many of Micronesia's leaders in the late sixties and early seventies, independence is no longer spoken of publicly or actively supported as an immediate goal for the last United Nations Trust Territory.

Micronesian leaders, who once spoke glowingly of unity and independence as major goals, now are bitterly divided and seem at times confused about resolving Micronesia's political future. The Marshalls and Palau, the two districts which were up front in the fight for independence, have now retreated and are seeking separate close political ties with the United States.

What has changed the political atmosphere in Micronesia? No one can really say, but it is abundantly clear that the atmosphere has changed dramatically.

Marshallese and Palauan leaders put the blame on the Congress of Micronesia. They maintain that just as the COM lost the Northern Marianas by ignoring that group's concerns, so the Marshalls and Palau are lost through failing to take into serious consideration their desires and wishes.

The COM and particularly its Micronesian Commission on Status and Transition, on the other hand, accuse the United States of dividing and conquering Micronesia. They cite as an example the Central Intelligence Agency surveillance of the Micronesian status negotiations as confirmed by the U.S. Congress.

Each side has logic on its side to some extent, but neither can achieve what it wants without the United States stepping in.

What is needed is a common denominator from which all parties, including the United States, can proceed to resolve Micronesia's future.

That is the task facing the roundtable conference beginning today in Honolulu between U.S. and Micronesian representatives.

It has become apparent in the last several years that the only unifying force of these islands is a common desire, at least for now, to maintain close political ties with the United States as provided in the draft compact of free association.

Political analysts here say the next step is to translate this desire into a political agreement which can satisfy the two sides of the Micronesian political equation.

A strong central government as envisioned in the draft constitution of the federated states of Micronesia, these analysts believe, is not the answer.

Instead, a loose political federation, with major powers reserved to the districts, would allow the Micronesians to live

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with each other and give the United States its goal of a united Micronesia, according to analysts here.

Reflecting this position, Kaleb Udui, the junior senator from Palau and floor leader in the COM Senate, said: "The federated states' constitution is outdated and should no longer be the basis for discussion. If we are going to have any political unity, it will be based on a loose political federation."

Analysts also believe that implementation of immediate self-government at the district level is in the best interest of all parties including the United States and will help stop the separatist bid in the Marshalls and Palau.

In the words of acting High Commissioner Boyd MacKenzie, "we need to implement self-government immediately so the Micronesians can learn again to live with each other."