

Coming--Nine American Island Fiefdoms

It is time to begin thinking about a new relationship between the Pacific islands and the United States. Such a relationship should include Guam, the Northern Marianas, Yap, Palau, Truk, Ponape, Kosrae, the Marshalls and American Samoa.

It is time we kicked out old theories and images, and looked at something entirely different.

We suggested earlier that the Honolulu conference between U.S. leaders and Micronesia wouldn't amount to much, partly because of the lack of unity between the islanders, partly because of the deplorable "bugging" by the United States of earlier talks and partly because the United States has no viable policy on its Pacific territories.

We're not alone in our belief that it's time to institute new policies in the Pacific. In a recent interview, Ratu Sir Kamiseva Mara, the prime minister of Fiji, challenged U.S. and T.T. leaders to begin a new relationship.

"It is a great pity," said Mara, "that they can only look at the stereotyped forms of association or independence." A new relationship, he said, would give the Pacific islands help from the United States but would allow them independence.

Mara spoke in Honolulu before the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He said the greatest assistance the United States could give the island nations would be help in exploiting the great resources of the Pacific Ocean.

The Pacific islands' future can't be resolved in time-tried-and-tested ways. The islands are too scattered, too small, and each has a different language and culture. They have no history of political

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unity, and little of politics and government in the sense we think of them in the United States.

Some help may be coming. The Ford Foundation recently awarded a \$41,000 grant to the Institute of International Law and Economic Development to study U.S. laws as they pertain to the rights and status of citizens and nationals residing in the territories. The study will be directed by Arnold H. Leibowitz, who is well-known on Guam for his work with the Political Status Commission.

Leibowitz said that the United States' problems in relationships with its territories stem from the islands' status. He said that since 1899, these island areas "have occupied an anomalous constitutional position in American law which the U.S. government has yet to clarify and which legal scholars have not explored."

U.S. territories historically have been treated in a second-class manner, under the theory that they would "evolve eventually into states," the institute said, and until they became states, most former territories were governed under U.S. laws "permitting extraordinary federal powers." Most American states entered the union this way.

A new type of relationship, the commonwealth, which guarantees local self-government under a permanent union with the U.S. on the basis of common citizenship, defense, currency and loyalty, has been developed for Puerto Rico and, more recently, the Mariana islands. But is this

arrangement satisfactory, or even permanent?

Although the United Nations has endorsed the associated state concept, there has been debate as to whether the United States has the right under international law to negotiate commonwealth status with the Northern Marianas.

In his book, "Micronesia: Trust Betrayed," Donald McHenry said of the complex domestic and international legal questions facing the United States in its Micronesian negotiations: "What is 'self-determination,' whether a right or a principle as it applies to Micronesia? Who or what in Micronesia has a legitimate claim to exercise the right to self-determination?"

Most delegates to the Honolulu talks felt that the round of discussions resulted in anything but a consensus. In fact, the reverse may be true. Islanders might now think the United States is seriously considering treating each island group separately.

U.S. Ambassador Philip W. Manhard said at the opening of the talks: "A creative solution is possible that will maintain the external components of unity...while allowing full scope to the aspirations of the individual districts."

But Tony DeBrum, spokesman for the Marshall Islands, said the machinery for self-government has already started in his district. "We are hoping that the United States will agree to separate ad-

ministration of the Marshall Islands by January 1978," he said.

The people of Palau district recently voted in favor of separate talks with the United States. Johnson Toribiong, a Palau spokesman, said the United States has seemingly recognized the rights of individual districts to negotiate their own future status. "It appeared that the U.S. indicated it would favor separate negotiations if this expedited the talks," Toribiong said. Manhard said that more informal "multilateral and bilateral" talks would be held during the summer.

The Congress of Micronesia and its status commission has, in our opinion, blown it. The day that they could have negotiated a unified agreement with the United States is past, thanks in part to the U.S. military and its pressure on the Department of State to allow the Marianas to break off.

Now we're going to see even more pressure for separate talks, first with Palau, then with the Marshalls, and then perhaps with Yap, Truk, Ponape and Kosrae.

The United States is going to end up with nine island nations, or governments, in the Pacific. Unity doesn't sound possible or even practical.

It's time that some thinker came up with a new concept in government, especially island government, that would allow each island or island group to govern itself, but at the same time, to have strong ties with the United States. These islands, then, would have some sort of federation to serve as a layer between them and Washington. Because of lack of planning, the United States has developed its own dilemma.JCM.