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Mariana Expectations Run High After a Plebiscite on U.S. Ties

By RICHARD HALLORAN
Special to The New York Times

SUSUPE, Mariana Islands, June 18—Jose Cruz paraded across the courtroom here on Saipan clapping his hands over his head and chortling: "I've become an unofficial American citizen tonight. I'm changing my name to Joe Smith."

Mr. Cruz walked past a blackboard on which were recorded the unofficial returns of a plebiscite yesterday. The voters voiced their approval of a plan under which the 14,000 people in the northern Marianas would become Americans and these Pacific islands a commonwealth of the United States.

The vote was just the first step in the process toward commonwealth status. The steps include Congressional approval of the proposal, Presidential approval of a constitution, and approval by the United Nations Security Council of the separation of the northern Marianas from the trusteeship of the Pacific Islands under which the United States has administered these islands since 1947.

But there were expectations that everything would be accomplished by 1980 or 1981, or possibly sooner. For the islanders, that means a national identity after three centuries of Spanish, German, Japanese, and American colonial rule.

Benefits Expected

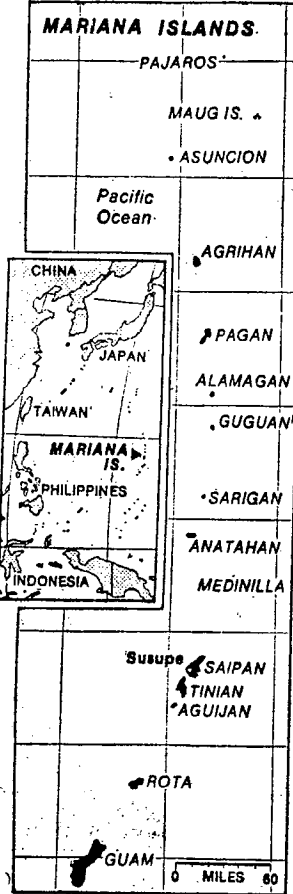
Most people here also expect economic benefits to improve life after 30 years of indifferent American administration that has left Saipan, the main island of the chain, what an American official privately called "an island slum."

But the Marianas, especially Mr. Cruz's home island of Tinian, three miles south of Saipan, will most likely become a major military base. Moreover, some think the promise of economic benefits has been overdone.

"I feel sorry for them," said an American resident. "They're not going to get what they expect."

Even so, the tone was optimistic.

"We want to be identified as Americans," Mr. Cruz said. "The Spanish called this place the Islands of Thieves, the Ladrones. But they did bring us Christianity. The Germans started the copra business and homesteading so that people



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improve under the new government. But there's nothing in the covenant that guarantees that my pay will improve."

Still another government employee said:

"It's too soon for the people of the Marianas to govern ourselves. If we govern ourselves, we should be in a position to negotiate with the Federal Government. But the people are not politically educated enough to fight the Federal Government. It's the politicians who are doing things for themselves. They've been negotiating for their own benefit. They don't give a damn for the people."

Some were indifferent. A waitress said she voted "because my mother told me to." On the other hand, a boy on a bicycle outside a polling station was asked whether he knew what the vote was about.

"Sure," he said with a smile, "they're going to say 'yes' and by 1980 or 1981 we'll be American."

If that comes to pass, the United States will gain a commonwealth of great natural beauty. The mountains on Saipan along the spine of the island are dark green and, on the west, slope gently down to a light green lagoon that spreads behind a coral reef nearly the length of the island.

There is little evidence that the United States has improved the lives of the people during its trust administration. Saipan is neither an unspoiled idyllic Pacific isle nor a developed tropical area, like Hawaii or even Guam. It is somewhere in between and that is its problem.

The island has no self-sustaining economy. Despite the lush vegetation, few farms with more than a scattering of banana trees are to be seen. Yet, in the Japanese days, it was a respectable producer of sugar cane.

Houses are tin shacks or frame sheds, although there are many concrete five-room or six-room houses. Sanitation is inadequate, the water supply chancy, electricity unreliable. Perhaps a thousand small cars, many of them dilapidated second-hand Japanese vehicles, jounce over rough or unpaved roads. Everywhere there is litter of soft drink and beer cans.

The largest single economic activity is government — the trust territory administration that runs the six districts of Micronesia plus the territories

ences various languages are spoken here.

The Chamorro and Carolinian communities are deeply split, with intermarriage discouraged, certain jobs held only by persons from one or the other, and separate living areas. In the plebiscite, many Carolinians voted against the commonwealth.

Mr. Rabauliman said the Carolinian community wanted to remain with the other five districts in the Micronesian trust territory so that they would not be a minority as they will be when the Marianas are separated from Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape, and the Marshall Islands.

But a policeman on duty at a polling station said:

"To tell you the truth, I don't understand the covenant. I'm a high school graduate and I can read the words and I can pronounce them. But I don't know what they mean. I don't

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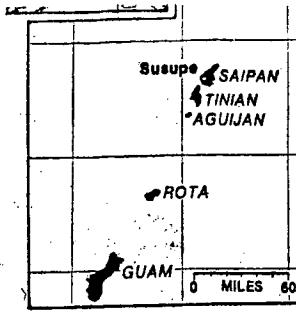
"We want to be identified as Americans," Mr. Cruz said. "The Spaniards called this place the Islands of Thieves, the Ladrones. But they did bring us Christianity. The Germans started the copra business and homesteading so that people could own their own land. But they and the Japanese failed to give us human rights. Under the Americans, for the first time we got democratic values and we can send our children to school."

"I know why the American military want Tinian. It's flat and there are few people and all of those are in one village. But there's no doctor or hospital, and no high school, and not much employment, and no shipping to take our agricultural products to a market. That's why we're willing to accept the military, to get the other things we need. That's the sacrifice we have to put up with."

Looking to U. S. Aid

Edward Pangelinan, the chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission, which negotiated the commonwealth covenant with American officials, said he expected a dramatic improvement in life once commonwealth was achieved.

"When Congress approves the covenant," he said, "we will get \$1.5-million in planning money. We can start planning for the \$14-million we will get each year after that. We're going to be able to upgrade the quality of government services and our infrastructure, to reorganize our legislature, and get our constitutional convention started. For the first time



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"To tell you the truth, I don't understand the covenant. I'm a high school graduate and I can read the words and I can pronounce them. But I don't know what they mean. I don't think the special education program has done much for the masses. The radio and the TV are full of propaganda. I don't know what to believe."

"You know, I help protect 14,000 people for 96 cents an hour. I expect my salary to

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The largest single economic activity is government — the trust territory administration that runs the six districts of Micronesia plus the local Mariana and Saipan Governments. All told, the Government employed 1,790 persons as of Dec. 31, or 47 per cent of the work force.

Tourism is considered the most promising prospect for the future.

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Not everyone is so optimistic. Felix R. Rabauliman, who was among those who led the opposition to the commonwealth covenant, said:

"The people do not understand what's in that covenant. The bad wasn't mentioned. The people are saying 'Now I'm poor but I'll be much better off after.' But if the people understood, they would not agree."

Mr. Rabauliman's unhappiness with plans for commonwealth status also had an undertone of fear—fear of discrimination. He is a Carolinian on an island dominated by Chamorros, who comprise about two-thirds of the 12,000 people on Saipan.

The people who live in the Marianas today are a mixture of races and ethnic groups, the consequence of migration and conquest. The original Chamorros, who may themselves have been a mixture of Asians and Polynesians from the South Pacific, nearly disappeared under Spanish rule or disease in the 16th century.

Today's Chamorros are descendants of the original Chamorros, Spaniards and Filipinos. The other major ethnic group is the Carolinians, or people from the Caroline Islands to the south. They are related to the Malays and came here about 150 years ago to settle.

There are also traces of the Germans, who took the islands when the United States did not want them after the Spanish-American War at the end of the 19th century. After that came the Japanese, who seized the islands from the Germans in 1914 and held them until 1944. Finally came the Americans. As a result of these varying influ-