

January 17, 1978

Comments on November 27, 1977, New York Times Article, "The Improbable Welfare State," by Fox Butterfield.

The United States administers the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Micronesia) under an agreement with the United Nations. In discharging the responsibilities of this agreement, the United States Government, through the Department of the Interior, is responsible for promoting the political, social, educational, and economic development of the inhabitants of these Pacific Islands.

In recent years the Department of the Interior's performance in these areas has been closely scrutinized by journalists, independent organizations, the United Nations and, most importantly, by Micronesians themselves. This scrutiny is invaluable to good government. The Department of the Interior welcomes exchanges of concerns, ideas, and information. However, some of the information presented as facts in Mr. Butterfield's article is misleading and inaccurate. A few of these misleading statements are listed and then contrasted with the reality of the situation.

Statement that 1200 Federal Programs exist in Yap

"In Yap, the most conservative of the island districts, where many women go about bare-breasted, dressed only in grass skirts, and men hold council in the District Legislature clad in loincloths, there are over 1,200 Federal programs available--everything from Head Start and Aid to Dependent Children to care centers for the elderly and free school breakfasts and lunches."

Reality of the Situation

The Trust Territory Government, of which the Yap District is a part, currently participates in some 166 Federal grant programs, although it is eligible for 482. Probably less than a third of these 166 programs are present in Yap District.

Statement that Yap imports \$1.3 million worth of beer a year

"With their Federal funds, Yap's 8,000 people imported \$1.3 million worth of beer last year or \$162 worth of beer per person, on an island where the annual per capita income is only \$974."

Reality of the Situation

For the twelve months period ended September 30, 1977, Yap District imported \$368,540 worth of beer. This is less than \$45 per capita for Yap's 8,348 population. These figures are based on import statistics maintained by the Department of Finance for the Trust Territory Government.

Statement on alcoholism and suicide

"Alcoholism is on the rise--a monumental pile of beer cans shimmering in the sun in front of the Yap District Legislature stands as mute testimony to the problem. Suicide has become the number one cause of death for young people."

Reality of the situation

The "monumental pile" of beer cans, so eloquently described, is the result of a "bounty" campaign to clean up trash around Yap Island. School children and others have gathered up an accumulation of several years of beer cans and they have been displayed at the District Legislature Building as part of an island-wide "clean-up" campaign.

There is no question that "alcoholism" is a serious problem in some parts of the Trust Territory and, especially amongst young males in their late teens.

In certain districts of the Trust Territory, in the last several years, an unusually high rate of suicide amongst Micronesian youth has been noted. Mr. Butterworth's statement appears to be taken from a recent article by Father Francis X. Hezel, S.J., who claimed that "suicide is the number one cause of death among Micronesians between the ages of 15 and 30, surpassing auto accidents, gastrointestinal diseases, and heart disease." Father Hezel points out, though, that this high rate of suicide appears to be concentrated in the Eastern Districts. He specifically notes that Yap had only a single suicide during the year under study. His data further show that only six suicides have taken place on Yap since 1973 and one of these was a Japanese tourist. Mr. Butterworth's article though seems to link the high rate of suicide to Yap Island where it does not appear to exist.

Statement on War Claims payment and use of War Claims money

"Colonia, a dusty, ramshackle settlement with no visible industry, has 500 new cars, one for every three of its inhabitants--they were bought with part of the \$7 million in World War II damage claims which the United States suddenly awarded Micronesians last January, all in one week."

Reality of Situation in Yap

To date, War Claims payments in Yap have been approximately \$2,280,000, the bulk going to the Outer Islands of the district, not Yap Island. \$1,280,000 has been paid under Title I of the War Claims act for damages suffered during World War II and this went mainly to the Outer Island area. Approximately \$1,000,000 has been paid under Title II and perhaps about 3/4 of this amount stayed in Yap Island. Title II payments were for lands taken or used by the U.S. or Trust Territory Governments after the islands had been captured during the war.

We have no statistics on how many new cars were purchased on Yap with the War Claims money awarded last year. However, statistics provided by the Trust Territory Government's Department of Finance indicate that the number was nowhere near 500. As of June 30, 1976, there were 309 privately owned vehicles in Yap. By September 30, 1977, there were 361.

The Outer Islands, where the majority of the claims were awarded, are mostly specks of land smaller than a square mile in area. Few islands have paths wide enough for cars or small trucks. Furthermore, statistics reveal only three motorcycles in the outer islands of Yap District at the end of September 1977.

Statement on Nuclear Hardware in Micronesia

"By Army regulations, Kwajalein's 7,000 people have had to live on the small neighboring island of Ebeye, in crowded, ghetto-like conditions, from which some of them commute to jobs on Kwajalein in the daytime."

Reality of the Situation

Crowded, ghetto-like conditions do exist on Ebeye Island and the TTPI Administration is attempting to ameliorate conditions there. However, Ebeye's 7,000 population do not all come from Kwajalein. Ebeye is a magnet whose "bright lights" and work opportunities on Kwajalein draw Micronesians from all over the Marshalls and from Ponape and Kosrae. Workers on the Kwajalein Missile project are limited to 550 and there are additionally some 150 domestic workers who commute to Kwajalein. Only some 2,000 individuals probably have direct land rights in the Kwajalein Atoll; the great bulk are relatives who have crowded in from other parts of the Marshall Islands.