Factors Affecting Micronesian Political Development[1]

JAMES HAWKINS[2]

NEGATIVE FACTORS

Micronesia is perhaps the most unlikely candidate for self-government or independence ·which has appeared in modern times. The boundaries of the area have been fixed by historical accident, population is small, distances are great, apparent natural resources are scarce, and divisive influences seem to be all but overwhelming. If one is to understand the anomaly that is Micronesia, one must be aware of the influences which tend toward self-interest and separatism between the various societies, the factors that militate against unity.

GEOGRAPHICAL ISOLATION

The thousands of miles of water separating the island groups, tremendously complicate transportation and communication. The distribution of population is such that relatively few communities are in close contact with each other on a frequent basis.

There are essentially seven urban or urbanizing centers in Micronesia which have many of the attributes of other urban centers throughout the world. Regular air service reaches these islands at least twice each week and there are regularly published newspapers (often mimeographed) and radio stations in each of these communities. As a result, these islands are linked together in a very real way and form the nucleus of a united Micronesia.

These urban district centers contain a total of about 25,000 of the Territory's 100,000 population. The remaining 75% live on islands at varying distances from the district centers. Transportation between the district centers and the outer islands is by small trading steamers or "field trip" ships owned by the government and leased to private transportation companies which operate the outer island service. Contact with the outer islands is tenuous at best and months may elapse with very little contact. This is especially true of the scattering of islands which lie between Yap and Truk, the islands to the south of Truk and the vast sea reaches of the Marshalls. The trading vessels stop at outer islands only briefly to pick up copra and deliver trade goods. Apart from this sporadic contact by ship the only other evidence of the outside world is through the transistor radio which may be

tuned to programs from the district center radio station.

In an environment such as this—a small island world bounded by the near water horizon—it is exceedingly difficult for an individual to gain a positive concept of being part of a larger society. The everyday concerns of extracting a subsistence living from an unfriendly soil, and an often difficult sea, preculde much thought about the political destiny of Micronesia as a whole. For example, a person living on Ujelang Atoll in the northwestern Marshalls will think of himself as a Ujelangese first and a Marshallese second. Rarely will he classify himself as a Micronesian. The same is true of other outer islanders who have little contact with the larger world. Because of the air service, travel between different district centers such as Truk and Ponape is far more frequent than travel between Truk and the outer islands of the Truk District.

There is very little in political science literature regarding the unity problems of a polity with great geographical spread. However, as Wriggins (1967:188) notes, distance is also one of the problems which have beset Indonesia, Burma, and India after independence. Cultural, economic and linguistic differences also contribute to the divisive influence.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES

Although the origins of the Micronesian people are obscure, it is clear that a variety of cultural patterns have influenced the islanders. As a result, the range of cultural differences is very great and poses a serious obstacle to political unity.

There are at least seven different cultural heritages currently existing in Micronesia, and to these must be added the residual Japanese and the growing American influence. While it is impossible here to examine the different Micronesian cultures, there are some significant divisive influences. Palau, for instance, has a society which is centered around the manipulation of wealth as a route to prestige and power, and Palauans were quick to recognize the advantages of manipulating American wealth and the importance of an education as a means of accelerating the clan accumulation of wealth.

Equally aggressive are the Chamorros of the Marianas. The original Chamorro culture has been largely destroyed over the centuries of Spanish, Japanese, and American domination, and the Chamorros are already oriented in the direction of Western ideas and Western culture. The importance of education as a route to success has been strongly reinforced and school attendance is higher in the Marianas than in any other district. The Chamorros generally tend to think of themselves as superior to other Micronesians and usually segregate themselves socially. A further divisive influence is the fact that Guam, with its heavily Chamorro population, has been separated politically from the other islands of the Marianas as an American Territory since 1900. There is a strong feeling for "reunification with Guam" among Chamorro citizens of the Marianas and a consequent reduction of a move toward pan-Micronesian unity.

Yap is easily the most traditional society in Micronesia as well as the island

group with the smallest population.   The society is still structured along rigid caste lines and political reactions tend to reflect this structure.   For instance, Yap is the only district which, at this writing, still does not have a representative district legislature, the present body being elected only by residents of the Yap Islands proper.   The outer islanders have always been regarded by the Yapese as inferior individuals whose primary function is to render tribute to specific high chiefs of Yap.   As a result, when the district legislature was organized, the outer islanders did not participate and still do not have a district franchise, although they elect a member of the Congress of Micronesia.   The other districts of Truk, Ponape, and the Marshalls are equally diverse and tend to cling to traditional cultural values, especially in the outer islands.   In the Marshalls, two high chiefs are the nominal land owners of all the islands in the group.   The actual residents of the islands hold the land through a series of lesser chiefs, or iroij, and traditionally were required to make a payment of a percentage of crops to the various chiefs.   Although this feudal system has weakened in recent years it is still a way of life and political influence has tended to follow the chiefly lines.   As young people have become educated some realignment has taken place but this has been minimal.

In addition to other cultural differences affecting the potential for unity among the island groups, linguistic differences make communication between the island peoples difficult.   There are nine different indigenous languages currently being spoken across the whole of Micronesia.   All of the languages belong to the Austronesian linguistic group, but none are mutually understandable.   Even within languages there are major dialects which cause some communication difficulty.

These ethnic and linguistic differences pose major problems to a Micronesian in search of a unifying influence which can weld the varied peoples into a single polity.   As Geertz (1967:167) has suggested there is tension inherent in the search for a common and increasingly important national identity, tending to conflict with the sense of self which "remains bound up in the gross actualities of blood, race, language, locality, religion or tradition."   The inner conflict is heightened by the fear of domination by another racial or linguistic group and the knowledge that the only route to material progress and social reform is through unity with other groups into a politically effective whole.

Geertz terms this basic ethnocentrism a matter of primordial bonds which seem to "flow more from a sense of natural—some would say spiritual—affinity than from social interaction."   The primary difficulty seems to be a matter of competing loyalties of the same order and on the same level of integration which tend to be mutually exclusive.   One can be a Catholic and also a Palauan or a teacher and also a Trukese.   One cannot be a Palauan and also a Trukese on the primordial level and if the Trukese identifies the concept of being a Micronesian with that of being transformed into a Palauan, he withholds his loyalty on a most basic level.

The foci around which primordial discontent tend to center are: (1) assumed blood ties, (2) race, (3) language, (4) regionalism, (5) religion, and (6) custom.   All of these are present to some degree in Micronesia although empirically one would

tend to select language, regionalism and custom as the most important. In terms of a Geertz pattern, Micronesia seems to fit the classification of a relatively even gradation of groups in importance from several large through several medium to small ones with none clearly dominant.

The six Micronesian districts fit this pattern quite well. The Truk District is the largest in population (26,000); Ponape and the Marshalls are nearly even with about 19,000 each. The Marianas and Palau are roughly even with about 12,000 each, and Yap is a poor last with a total population of about 7,000. In addition, Micronesia can be in part compared to Ceylon (Wriggins, 1967) where a minority (the Tamils) are industrious and aggressive and in conflict with a majority (the Sinhalese) who are much less so. The Chamorros and the Palauans fit the pattern of the industrious, aggressive Tamils with the other Micronesians being less willing to break with tradition. Furthermore, the Marianas and the Palau districts are much more compact geographically with resultant homogeneity and ease of providing basic governmental services such as health and education.

One result of this aggressive drive has been a much higher percentage of Chamorro and Palauan youth taking advantage of education services including college scholarships, and a much higher percentage of these educated youths aggressively seeking better jobs with the Territorial government or private businesses. Already some of the other groups have, less than half jokingly, accused the Palauans of trying to take over the government. Herein may lie the seeds of future primordial discontent which could have serious effects upon Micronesian unity. What will happen as power passes from the hands of the American administration to Micronesians and as a modernizing economy places increasing value on education and training? This question becomes especially critical in the light of the recently developing independence movement which would apparently contemplate rapid replacement in Government of Americans by Micronesians.

Coleman (1965) has approached this problem from a somewhat different viewpoint but has arrived at basically the same analysis as Geertz. According to Coleman, a major contributing factor to the "underdevelopment syndrome is a very high degree of cultural fragmentation." In some polities, this cultural fragmentation reflects major political culture discontinuities between the authority systems of different ethnic groups. Strongly held authority systems derive from the socializing influence of parents upon their children in terms of the traditional culture instead of in the direction of a national identity. Thus a Yapese who, as a child, is socialized into a system with great emphasis upon caste has great difficulty when, as an adult, he is faced with the democratic principle which proclaims all men are created equal.

Coleman feels that one answer to this problem of political fragmentation lies in the educational system of the polity and that in areas where there are substantial primordial influences at work the educational system must deliberately seek to overcome this influence. The school must teach literacy as well as attitudes congruent with modernization if successful political penetration and meaningful citizenship is to be achieved. Both Coleman and Geertz suggest that the common experience

of education in a system which cuts across regional and ethnic identities is a unifying influence and that teaching a nonindigenous language for communication purposes will help develop a common understanding. If this is correct, Micronesia has tended to abandon one major unifying influence which operated for a number of years, viz., the central boarding high schools.

There are other examples to which Micronesia might turn in order to gain insight to the path toward unity and modernization. Apter (1967: 64) contends that the structural form and intrinsic values of the traditional society play a large part in a peoples' adaptation to political modernization. Uganda and Ghana are the two examples used and their routes toward political modernization are contrasted. On the one hand Ghana suffered severe discontinuities as political innovations threatened traditionalism in that nation. Uganda, on the other hand, was able to accept and adapt innovation because of relatively careful planning which allowed innovative ideas to reinforce traditionalism.

Apter sees the difference between the two polities as a basic difference in the type of traditionalism existing in each area. Ghana, it is claimed, has a "consumatory" type of traditionalism which is exceedingly complex and which has a close relationship between intermediate and ultimate ends. Basically, innovation in a "consumatory" system tends to threaten the fundamental values held by that society because of the interdependent nature of the cultural matrix. Thus in certain societies the introduction of a new and better method of producing food crops will be strongly resisted because the traditional method of production has strong religious or social values. On the other hand Uganda is representative of a society with "instrumental" traditionalism which is adaptive and in which there is a large sector of intermediate ends separated from and independent of ultimate ends. Innovation in an "instrumental" social system is accepted with enthusiasm to the extent that it does not threaten the ultimate ends of the society. Thus new methods of growing food crops will be implemented in a society which has separated its food production method from religious or social values. In this society the reinforcement of intermediate ends is seen as promoting the strongly held ultimate ends.

If Apter is correct (and he musters impressive evidence to support his contention), a close look at the cultural values held by Micronesian societies should be undertaken prior to the introduction of political innovation. An analysis of each of the Micronesian societies is beyond the scope of this paper but the fact that significant differences exist in the willingness of the various island groups to accept innovation should be noted. Again, Palau and Yap present the greatest contrast with the Palauans having adopted new ways with great ingenuity in serving traditional ends. Yap, on the other hand, has rejected innovation apparently because of closely held "consumatory" values. Other Micronesian groups present contrasts which are almost as great.

What are the implications of bringing together a "consumatory" social system with one that is predominantly "instrumental" in nature, especially in a political system which may be self-governing or independent? Apter does not speculate

on this but the result could be disastrous if the instrumental society seeks to force innovation upon the consumatory group.

<div align="center">HISTORICAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT</div>

Paradoxically, the democratic political development which has already taken place under United States leadership is, in part, a seriously divisive force. In order to understand the reasons for this, one must review the history of political development since World War II.

As the war ended Micronesia was in a chaotic condition both economically and politically. The economy which the Japanese had built was in collapse, and with the removal of Japanese administrators, the government ceased to function. American naval officers hastily trained in island administration were brought in to assume local civil responsibility. However, the total emphasis of the United States was upon winning the war and the civil administrators had very little with which to work. In any event, the economic problems in the larger population centers loomed so large that all initial efforts were focused upon feeding, clothing, and housing these war-shocked people. Fortunately, much of the traditional social and political systems still existed and the various Micronesian societies readily reverted to old ways as Japanese authority was withdrawn. The arrival of American administrators did not seriously threaten the traditional social order and Micronesians welcomed the new rulers of the area.

After Micronesia was placed under the United Nations Trusteeship system in 1947, the United States began to give serious thought to the problems of internal self-government and of local responsibility. The central government was not, however, Micronesianized and Americans were in firm control of all central administrative functions. On July 1, 1952 the administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was transferred from the Navy to the Interior Department and six months later the first Trust Territory Code of laws was promulgated by Executive Order. The establishment of the Code as the basic law of Micronesia committed the United States to work toward the establishment of strong local and regional governmental units; provided a means for the chartering of municipal and district government; divided the Territory into six administrative districts; defined the boundaries of these districts and provided a legal basis for the levying of certain taxes which were to be used to finance municipal and district governments.

In the ten years following the establishment of the code, all districts established district legislatures and many municipalities were chartered. Taxes were levied and public finance was paying for an increasing variety of services—chiefly education.

In 1964, the Secretary of the Interior promulgated Executive Order No. 2882 establishing the Congress of Micronesia as the Legislative Branch of the Trust Territory Government. Among other provisions, the Executive Order stipulated that power to levy import and export taxes was reserved to the Congress which effectively eliminated the chief source of district legislature income and the districts

faced a financial crisis. The problem was partially resolved by the assumption of all elementary school costs by the Trust Territory Government from United States funds and the remission of one-half the import taxes collected in any district to that district for expenditure by the district legislature.

The establishment of the Congress of Micronesia thus at first posed a serious threat to the district legislatures and aroused anticongressional feeling at the outset. While much of this feeling has lessened during the four years the Congress has been in existence, the potential for difficulty is still there. Revenues must rise at both the territorial and district level if the two levels of government are to meet their rising needs and aspirations. If new tax sources fail and if revenue fails to meet need, continued discontent and conflict could be the result.

SUMMARY COMMENTS

The major divisive factors affecting political modernization in Micronesia have been mentioned but others also exist. The differences between the islands due to historical accident are important. For instance, the ten year control (1952–1962) of Saipan and Tinian by the Navy produced an economic advantage not enjoyed by other islands. The location of the Trust Territory Headquarters complex on Saipan has continued this advantage. The location of the missile test site on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshalls has had a profound economic and social effect upon some of the Marshallese. Certain of the islands which have been used extensively by the United States Government have received payments both in cash and by the establishment of trust funds which has or will have important and possibly divisive effects for the future.

It is important that Micronesian political leaders as well as the American administrators carefully consider the existing and potential divisive factors affecting the Trust Territory. When innovation (either political, social, or economic) is planned, the divisive effect much be weighed. The leadership should plan for and deliberately seek out those innovations which will propel toward unity and positively reinforce traditional values. It is too much to expect that all divisive influences and destructive innovations can be eliminated. However, many can be reduced through careful planning and frequent consultation with Micronesian leaders. Additional problems have been sometimes experienced when a young Micronesian returns home with a college degree from an American university. Frequently he obtains employment with the American administration and is expected by the administration to react in American ways. His own people consider him to be one of them and expect him to react in Micronesian ways. When the two expectations are divergent, serious tension within the individual and within the society may result. This tension is reduced if the individual is employed outside his home district and culture.

POSITIVE FACTORS

If Micronesia can unite to form an effective polity, it will geographically be the largest Pacific state in existence and be made-up of a greater number of diverse peoples in a single nation than exists elsewhere in the Pacific. Despite the many problems which adversely affect Micronesian political unity there are powerful forces which are bringing Micronesians together.

CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA

Although there are some disintegrative potentials inherent in the establishment of the Congress of Micronesia as the Legislative Branch of the Trust Territory Government, this body has more unifying potential than any other single factor as also mentioned by Meller in another article in this issue. For the first time in their history, Micronesians have an effective focus for their aspirations and dreams of unity and self-government. In the years preceding the establishment of the Congress there was no common forum, no visible or actual symbol of Micronesia as such, with which Micronesians could identify. The American High Commissioner, although he is the head of government, was the visible symbol of United States authority and domination.

The Congress may legislate on all matters with the exception of United States laws applicable to the Trust Territory, treaties or international agreements of the United States, Executive Orders of the President of the United States or of the Secretary of the Interior, and the basic Bill of Rights of the Trust Territory Code. All bills passed are presented to the High Commissioner for approval, but if the High Commissioner vetoes a bill, it may be passed over his veto by two-thirds majority of the Congress. If the High Commissioner still disapproves the bill, it is to be referred to the Secretary of the Interior for final action. At the outset, members of Congress could simultaneously hold a position in the Executive Branch of government and many who served were also important members of the administration. However, the Executive Order required that by the general election of November 1968, all such members of the Congress had to divest themselves of positions with the administration. The annual salary for all members of the Congress is now fixed at $3,500.

A functioning integrated body, composed for the most part of young, well-educated men, the Congress also has several traditional chiefs elected from two districts. Elections are well advertised and attract great attention from the citizens of the islands. Although political parties as such have developed only in the Marianas and Palau Districts, there is considerable competition among the candidates for Congressional seats. Election participation is high and interest in the balloting is keen. When Congress is in session, a special Congressional News Service actively informs the news media, including radio and newspapers of critical issues and important actions. The result of this has been a Micronesia-wide concentration of interest upon the Congress and its emergence as the symbol of an increasingly

united Micronesia.

Another important unifying influence of the Congress of Micronesia is its expanding role as an important core of opposition to American policies thought to be unjust or improper.   A case in point is the two-year effort of the administration to have enacted an amended version of Chapter 20 of the Trust Territory Code having to do with eminent domain procedures.   The 1967 session of the Congress passed the bill, but with a vital amendment, providing that prior to taking any land for military purposes clearance must be sought from the Congress.

The bill was unacceptable to the administration and did not become law because the High Commissioner failed to approve the bill within the thirty-day limit after the adjournment of the Congress (Dept. of Interior, 1964).   In the 1968 session of the Congress, the eminent domain bill became an issue of popular support and was seen as a prime instrument with which to confront the American administration.   The Congress passed the identical bill unanimously within the first twenty days of Congress, thus forcing the High Commissioner to actually veto the bill. It was repassed over the High Commissioner's veto and, at this writing, is in the hands of the Secretary of the Interior for resolution.

Land has always been an object of almost mystical concern for the people of Micronesia.   By far the largest number of civil cases which come before its courts have to do with land matters.   In an island territory where land—especially productive land—is scarce and is the ultimate source of life, the ownership of land assumes an importance that modern Americans cannot fully understand.   In its new-found legislative power, the Congress of Micronesia attempted to respond to the feeling of the people for land through amendments to the eminent domain bill.   While the amendments provided controls which were unacceptable to the American administration, they reflected Micronesian attitudes which unite Micronesians and will continue to prove difficult for the American.

ATTITUDES TOWARD AMERICANS

Americans are, for the most part, not seriously disliked in Micronesia.   Indeed, many of the Americans living and working in the islands have formed close friendships with Micronesians and intermarriage is increasingly common.   It is important to understand, however, that many Americans—especially in their bureaucratic phase—present conflicting and negative images to Micronesians.   The people of the islands have experienced corrupt and lazy administrators as well as arrogant and unfeeling attitudes on the part of American territorial employees.   Personnel attached to the Trust Territory tend to live apart in American enclaves and frequently the interpersonal relationships between Micronesians and Americans is reduced to an absolute minimum.   The Micronesian sees the American living in a far better house, enjoying a huge (relative to Micronesian) salary with conveniences of water, electricity, and sewage denied the Micronesian family and inevitably resentment begins to mount.

Americans in Micronesia, as the British in East Africa and the Dutch in Indo-

nesia, are a presence which serves to unite the people of the land.   In their common dissatisfaction with the foreign overlords, cultural differences are frequently forgotten and the people of the islands unite against the inept, the insensitive and the overbearing American.   Fortunately, all Americans do not cause this reaction but there are enough who do to present severe problems for those in the administration seeking to work closely and sympathetically with Micronesians.   The methods of Civil Service recruitment have no way of measuring attitudes toward dark skinned peoples or motives for coming to the islands and Micronesia receives more than its share of misfits.

All of this increases the unity of Micronesians.   While American expenditures and the presence of American personnel have brought a measure of economic activity to many of the islands, this fact tends to be outweighed by the dual wage scale, the differences in housing and other living conditions and the attitudes of a few Americans in the islands.   As tourism mounts, this adverse Micronesian reaction to Americans may increase.

OTHER FACTORS

There are a number of other unifying factors which affect Micronesian political modernization.   There is the unifying influence of attendance of Micronesian youth at colleges and universities outside Micronesia.   The two institutions where Micronesian students are concentrated are the University of Guam and the University of Hawaii.   Students from all of the Trust Territory are in attendance at these schools (as well as smaller numbers in many other schools) and social activities as well as the shared educational experience serve as major unifying influence.   It is not uncommon, for instance, for students from different Trust Territory districts to marry while at the University.

Social clubs and Micronesian associations are formed when numbers of students are concentrated which permit the exploration of common problems.   The perspective of distance permits a more comprehensive and dispassionate view of Micronesian problems than is possible within the Territory.   Students at the University of Hawaii, for instance, have joined together for political purposes on several occasions.   At one point in early 1969, they addressed a petition to President Nixon requesting the continuation of the incumbent High Commissioner.   They also addressed a petition to the President of the United States and to the United Nations requesting renegotiation of the Trusteeship Agreement to eliminate the "strategic" portion of the Agreement.

Under sponsorship of district governments and with Peace Corps manpower assistance, the first "Microlympic" Games are being planned for 1969, in which athletes from all districts of Micronesia will compete in track and field, swimming and other events.   This athletic development has grown from sporadic interdistrict contests of previous years.   In addition to athletics, interdistrict high school debates and other events have occurred from time to time.   While competition is a fundamental feature, the drawing together of large numbers of youth from dif-

ferent districts, the exchange of ideas and the resulting sense of being "Micronesian" will prove to be a unifying influence. With English rapidly becoming the language of communication throughout Micronesia, inter-district events of all kinds become possible.

The major unifying influences in Micronesia have been operative for only a short period of time. Already the effect of these influences is beginning to be apparent. The invisible bonds which tie different peoples and cultures together are in the process of being forged. Much of the future political shape of these Micronesian islands depends upon the strength and permanency of these bonds.

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