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PINGELAP POLITICS AND AMERICAN-MICRONESIAN RELATIONS¹

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From its inception in April 1947, the Trust Territory of Micronesia was designated as the only United Nations "strategic" trusteeship (United Nations 1947:394). In 1963 the Solomon Team, appointed by President Kennedy to investigate conditions in the Territory, reported, "the time could come, and shortly, when the pressures in the UN for a settlement of the status of Micronesia could become more than embarrassing" (McHenry 1975:231).² Beginning with that administration, United States funds flowed into the Territory in much larger amounts than formerly, but the question of termination of trusteeship remained unresolved. After many years of debate, a compromise between Micronesian moves toward political self-determination and continued American interest in the area emerged in the form of the *Compact of Free Association* (1982) signed in 1983 (The National Union 1983a).

The debates which preceded agreement centered on the right of unilateral termination of the agreement by Micronesia, the issue of eminent domain regarding U.S. military requirements, as well as issues of financial and temporal considerations. In this paper I focus on the special problems of the people of an outer island, Pingelap atoll in the eastern Carolines, whose concerns regarding future relations with the United States and within the newly emerged Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) often have been remote from the issues that provided the heat in the prolonged discussions which culminated in the Compact agreement. These concerns, and their most recent political implications with respect to the options that have been considered for future U.S.-Micronesian relations, will be presented as reflecting the circumstances of the unique history of Pingelap, particularly with regard to insulation of local politics and to Pingelapese conceptions of the conditions of their life under American trusteeship.

PINGELAP ATOLL

The location of Pingelap at 6°13'N and 160°42'W places it within the belt of moist climate which makes possible highly luxuriant plant life even in the poor atoll soils (Wiens 1962:366; Alkire 1978:12). A large taro patch, numbers of breadfruit and coconut trees, and fish from the bordering reef and sea provide the chief sources of subsistence. The approximately 175 hectares of land area of the three islands of the atoll has supported up to 1,000 people, the peak populations being reached at about the turn of the present century (Eilers 1934), though 700 is a more representative figure during recent years. Linguistic comparisons (Morton 1972) show closest affinities with Ponape, 160 miles WNW, although certain independent developments have occurred since the presumed original Ponapean settlement. Matriclans, rather than showing great strength as on Ponape and elsewhere in the Carolines, survive only to regulate marriage to some

degree. Land tenure is organized within the virilocal extended family, and most germane to this paper, although the important traditional political titles show clear linguistic heritage from Ponapean forms, they are channelled patrilineally on Pingelap, rather than through matrilineal or merit considerations as on the high island (Riesenberg 1968; Fischer 1974).

Legendary history names 25 paramount chiefs (*nahmwariki*) (Morton *et al.* 1973) preceding the current chief. A court of nine male title holders expanded to fifteen during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Damas 1983). Periodic and special meetings of that body decided such matters as staging ceremonies, settlement of various disputes, and punishment of offenders of customary regulations. In addition to filling such roles as paramount chief and "talking chief," members acted as village policemen, and two as priests who presided over the products of the land and the sea, respectively, at communal feasts.

THE EARLY CONTACT AND COLONIAL PERIODS

In common with many Micronesian islands and atolls, castaways lived for periods on Pingelap during the nineteenth century (Hurd 1977) and there was some contact with whalers and *beche de mer* traders and, eventually, with resident copra traders. These elements seem to have had little impact on the political organization of the atoll, though there is some evidence that the notorious Bully Hayes may have influenced the last premission *nahmwariki* in postponing Christianization (Hurd 1977). Christianity as introduced by the American Board of Commissions for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1872 has been a powerful force throughout the postcontact history of Pingelap. It was mainly through the medium of Ponapeans that the mission was established on the atoll. Despite some symbolic struggles between the traditional gods and the Christian God that are depicted in legend (Hurd 1977), total conversion occurred almost immediately when the new faith was accepted by the reigning paramount chief. There appears to have been little overt conflict between the mission and the traditional court of title holders, but several fundamentalist Christian ethical considerations found their way into the customary regulatory structure of the island. Chief among these were rules against gambling, smoking, drinking or brewing alcoholic beverages, adultery, and working on Sundays. Gradually, church elders assumed more important roles in secular life, one of the most prominent being their receiving large shares of food distributed at feasts (Hurd 1977), a privilege formerly accorded only title holders. Christian prayers also appeared as part of traditional ceremonies.

There is no evidence for serious interference in life on the atoll during the Spanish (1885-99), German (1899-1914), or through most of the Japanese (1914-45) periods. While the Germans made strenuous efforts to revise land tenure practices on Ponape (Fischer 1958), they did not tamper with Pingelapese land practices, probably because of the isolation of the atoll from their center of administration at Ponape, but possibly also because land tenure on Pingelap already showed the patrilineal bias favored by the Germans.

The Japanese named the then-reigning (1924-64) *nahmwariki* "Island Magistrate" (Morton *et al.* 1973:322) and, although Japanese traders lived on Pingelap during the period of the League of Nations Mandate, the court of chiefs continued to dominate local politics, though the influence of the church elders and of Christian elements in social control probably also grew during that period.

During World War II a small detachment of Japanese military and weather-communications personnel disrupted the almost complete autonomy that the islanders had enjoyed previously. While stories of their abuses are probably exaggerated, there are persistent accounts that this detachment commandeered women, meted out corporal punishment, and demanded food when their own supplies ran low. More traumatic were the American air raids which destroyed the

church building (St. John 1948:98) and brought on temporary relocation of the population from the traditional village site.

DEVELOPMENTS UNDER AMERICAN TRUSTEESHIP

Under United States Navy administration (1945-52) a Ten Man Council formally replaced the court of title holders as the official governing body on the atoll, but the change was more apparent than real since most of the council members were also title holders and the council was headed by the *nahmwariiki*. More comprehensive changes in formal local organization took place under the terms of the *Code of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* issued in 1952 (Steincipher 1970). Chief Magistrates were elected for renewable terms of two years each and served as chief executives of the island; and a presiding judge, an associate judge, and a Public Defender were appointed. Four policemen, one designated as Captain of Police, a Secretary-Treasurer, and a four-man council representing the four traditional sections of the village, also served definite terms. As in the case of the Ten Man Council, and as was the practice elsewhere in Micronesia during the early years of elective government, it was usually the traditional title holders who were first elected to the more important of these posts (Meller 1969:26ff), but in time popularity rather than hereditary considerations began to dominate community elections. Most of the tangible political duties of the court of chiefs were then eclipsed by the incumbents to the elected positions. During the times of my visits to Pingelap between 1975 and 1983, informants argued that these chiefs still held high status, though it appeared to me that this status was almost purely honorific in the cases of most of the titles.

The acceptance of the idea of election on an island where ascription had dominated the previous political history (Damas 1983) is perhaps remarkable. One of the factors that helped ease the transition from effective control by the council of chiefs was that Pingelap had never developed much stratification, despite the deferential behavior accorded the chiefs and concentration of decision-making in their council. Pingelapese have an intense interest in politics, which is perhaps a PanMicronesian trait, so that competition for local government posts proved intriguing and absorbing. Then, too, with the formation of colonies of Pingelapese on Ponape and frequent sojourns away from the atoll by many of the title holders, their representation there declined, especially during the period of American trusteeship, so that they could not have continued to form an effective political body.

Conceptions of life under U.S. trusteeship involve assessments both of Americans as individuals and of American policies as compared to other foreign elements and earlier administrations. In spite of a somewhat mixed picture, Pingelapese mainly speak of both Germans and Japanese with a tolerance that characterizes their personal assessments, but Americans are regarded with special warmth.

During the trusteeship period American botanists introduced new crops, especially faster growing aroids that have made possible more rapid recovery from periodic floodings of the main taro patch. Beginning in the 1960s, Peace Corps workers have helped to develop formal schooling, medical aid, and merchandising on the island. In the late 1960s a party of U.S. missile watchers lived on the island and their stay is remembered as a happy time. Helicopter rides, visiting characterized by considerable jocularly, and an emergency shipment of food which this party arranged from their base in the Marshalls, are chief memories of that presence.

By the 1970s all Pingelapese youth could expect schooling through the eighth grade on the atoll and many attended high school on Ponape. Others attended and some eventually graduated from American colleges and universities. These latter

students often brought back reports of kindness and hospitality of American individuals and families.

While earlier administrations had provided some material aid after periodic storms that damaged the islands of the atoll—in the case of the typhoon of 1905, the Germans had relocated a number of the inhabitants (Morton *et al.* 1973:323)—American measures were plainly more immediate and substantial. Not only did the U.S. administration provide food and other supplies to the islanders during the rebuilding and replanting that followed the 1957 and 1972 typhoons, but they also provided materials for sea walls to protect both the village and the taro patch. American funds also supported construction of a pier that extended from the beach to the edge of the reef to help in unloading vessels that had no anchorage at the atoll. In 1976 materials were sent for a fence which was then built to protect the taro patch from the intrusions of loose pigs, a source of crop destruction since introduction of that animal to Pingelap a century earlier. The construction of a landing strip made transportation on a more regular basis possible (The National Union 1982a). A radio service, including a weather report schedule, had been provided for several years before my arrival. In 1979 a highly successful solar radiation unit replaced the gasoline generator that had previously powered the station.

Since local men were trained in education, by 1975 all of the resident teachers were Pingelapese. This group formed an intellectual, and, through their modest but regular salaries, something of an economic elite. Several of the teachers were elected to local government posts or became important in the church or followed both of these routes to community influence.

While the court of chiefs had stopped meeting as a body before 1975, the church had inexorably gained strength in local affairs and the hereditary paramount chief for the period 1964-81 had consolidated his position through elections to higher and higher posts within the Trust Territory government (Damas 1983:11) and by ordainment into the church. It was within the context of the strength of the ABCFM mission that Pingelap demonstrated a high degree of local autonomy in a series of events in 1978-79.

THE RELIGIOUS CRISIS

In March 1978 the field trip vessel arrived with four Seventh Day Adventist missionaries: three Americans and one Pingelapese, and their families. Reaction to the attempted intrusion of a new faith on the island which had been a "one church reserve" for 100 years came immediately when the local people refused to help unload the building supplies and other goods brought by the missionaries (Sengebau 1978:36), forcing the group to unload by themselves. Shortly after the news of this resistance arrived in Ponape, a party was formed which was comprised of representatives of both missions, the acting District Administrator (DisAd), and several Ponapean policemen. They set out with a special chartering of the field trip ship and stayed on Pingelap for about a week without reaching a solution to the problems raised by the new mission. In fact, during that visit, destruction of the building material of the new mission and a street fight between youths of the factions occurred. In neither case did either the DisAd or the Ponapean police attempt to interfere. At the end of the week the three American missionaries and their families, the representatives of both churches, and the DisAd departed, leaving behind the Pingelapese Seventh Day Adventist missionary to try to continue his work and three Ponapean policemen to keep the peace. Before he left, the DisAd appointed a commission of local men to seek a resolution to the conflicts, although several members of this commission formed the core of opposition to the new mission.

The point of greatest contention was the practice of the Seventh Day Adventists working on Sundays. During the visit of the party from Ponape, the

Pingelapese Seventh Day missionary proposed that his group would agree to abstain from working on Sundays if they could worship on Saturdays. The DisAd vetoed this proposal because in his view such a move would violate the stand on religious freedom endorsed by the Code of the Trust Territory.

A period of relative quiet ensued during which the visiting police were feted and flattered. When they returned to Ponape they reported that Pingelap again lived in harmony. However, the practice of the converts of the new mission working on Sundays still remained a very sore issue. The four teachers who formed the agitating core of the opposition encouraged the traditionalists of the island in their belief in the "curse of Pingelap" which was said to have caused calamity each time in the past that the ban against Sunday work had been violated. The main sanction imposed was forbidding the Seventh Day Adventist people from trading at the Pingelap Cooperative Association store, the rationale being that since the store had been built on church property, sales to the members of the new mission would violate the sanctity of that soil.

In early June 1978 I returned to Pingelap with a party of Ponapean title holders, also included was the district Legislator and the Senator from the Congress of Micronesia, both of whom were native Pingelapese educated abroad and normally living in Ponape. During this visit, which was aimed at explaining the projected constitution of the emerging FSM, the Senator addressed the people on the question of the new mission, urging tolerance. He emphasized, as had the DisAd earlier, that actions against the Seventh Day Adventist people would violate the still valid Code of the Trust Territory.³

When this party left Pingelap a few days later, the firebrands of the opposition, several of the teachers, also moved to the high island for the summer vacation period to attend their annual upgrading classes. During my stay on the atoll in the summer of 1978, the religious situation calmed somewhat in the absence of this core element. The storekeeper, although not a member of the new mission himself, held close kinship ties with their missionary and others of the converts and began to allow the Adventists to trade at the community store.

Considering the strong objections raised both by the DisAd and the Senator and that the associate judge, who was one of the converts, had submitted a statement to the District Court at Ponape objecting to local actions against the new mission, I assumed that their case would be upheld and that possibly their influence and following expand. I learned otherwise on my brief return to Pingelap in 1980.

In the year before, three converts to the new faith were arrested and fined for working on a Sunday and their appeals to both the District Court at Ponape and to the High Court of the Trust Territory in Saipan overruled. The High Court based its decision on the notion that customary law upheld the ban against Sunday work.⁴ The eventual solution on Pingelap to this conflict was a reversion to the original suggestion of the Pingelapese Seventh Day missionary—his parishioners worshiped on Saturdays but also did not work on Sundays, thus adopting a two day weekend.

This religious crisis not only resulted in strong affirmation of an important element of local power structure, the ABCFM mission, it also reveals important points about the external relations of the Pingelapese near the end of the period of American trusteeship.

Of course, the seemingly bizarre interpretation of local custom ruled by the High Court fortified the position of the established church on Pingelap and, since the majority supported opposition to the new mission and the presiding judge on the atoll was very much influenced by that church, there was important popular and local legal support. The second highest title holder (and in the usual absence of the *nahmwariki* the leading representative of the chiefs) was also absorbed into the reaction movement, effecting an alliance with the traditional title system. In

August 1980 I noted significant changes in Pingelap from earlier visits. The once extroverted and boisterous Pingelapese seemed to have been transformed into a community of sober, devout, religionists occupied mainly in their apparently constant trips to service, beckoned by the morbid tones of a conch shell. Representatives of the ABCFM mission strictly enforced a nine p.m. curfew and the edict against any Sunday activities not directly connected with church affairs. Not only were there three services on Sunday, the daily morning services in the four chapels that represented the traditional territorial divisions of the village, but some churchly function also involved most of the community each night of the week. The once spontaneous and noisy village now resembled one of those Pacific islands depicted in film and novel where the tyranny of religion quells the spirit of a free people. The chief differences between Pingelap in 1980 and those perhaps fictional situations was that the religious tyrants were not white missionaries but members of the community who perpetuated the spirit of fundamentalist Christianity, and this spirit was so much internalized on the island as to be regarded as an essential part of traditional and sacred Pingelapese custom by a substantial segment of the population.

The failure of the District Administrator and of the Senator to interfere successfully in opposition to the new mission, together with the impotence or indifference of external church officials and police in that crisis, could not have but convinced the Pingelapese majority that external sanctions could or would not be brought to bear against them. When not only the district court of Micronesians, but also the High Court of the Trust Territory, presided over by an American judge, ruled in favor of the established ABCFM church, it served to strengthen the feeling that the sanctity and immunity of their cause were assured and affirmed by the powers of the United States government. Despite reorganization of formal local government according to American patterns, the religious crisis demonstrated that Pingelap remained largely insulated from external pressures.

PINGELAP IN 1983

While my impressions of Pingelap in 1980 led me to expect that the religious regime would continue dominant in community affairs, certain developments had altered that picture by the time of my visit to the atoll in May 1983.

The adverse ruling of the High Court and family pressures caused nearly all of the converts to the Seventh Day Adventist mission to drift back to the ABCFM. In 1983 there remained only one nuclear family head associated with the new mission, though he was joined shortly later by his brother who resumed the temporarily vacant missionary post. Removal of the threat earlier posed by the new mission had much to do with relaxing the severely restrictive control of the community by the ABCFM and a decline in church related activities. In general, a much more relaxed atmosphere prevailed than existed in 1980. There were fewer church meetings, such unChristian activities as brewing, drinking alcoholic beverages, and gambling were renewed, the evening curfew was relaxed, and much more freedom of movement was reported on Sundays. I could appreciate most directly that in the auditory dimension, the state of near pandemonium which had been the most vivid memory of my longest visit to the atoll (1975-76) was restored.

Ascendency of a new, and usually resident, *nahmwari*ki also proved a moderating force in the community by this time. The prestige of the often absent previous office holder diminished during the religious crisis. Despite his involvement in the ABCFM on Pingelap, this *nahmwari*ki had sent notice during that crisis that he did not support opposition to the new mission. Indeed, the crisis placed him in an exceedingly awkward position because not only was the Seventh Day Adventist missionary one of his sons, but another son was also the Chief

Magistrate at that time. When the latter did not join the opposition movement, it was not surprising that he was not re-elected in 1978. Under these conditions, the second ranking chief who lived on the island during the crisis period greatly enhanced his own position to the extent that, contrary to normal routes of succession, some of the Pingelapese proposed him as a serious candidate to the *nahmwariki* title.

After the religious crisis had subsided, but before the death of the paramount chief of 1964-81, his eldest son and designated heir moved to Pingelap to serve as principal of the island school. He had spent some years away from the atoll earning a bachelor's degree and later worked in the educational division of the district government in Ponape. Doubts were expressed about his personal suitability for succession during my visits but affirmation as successor followed shortly after his father's death, in 1981, according to the traditional principles of patrilineality and primogeniture. By 1983 his position as paramount chief seemed well consolidated in that he was perceived as the judicious, tolerant, moderate, and respected figure appropriate to that post. This image did not seem to exclude a liberal view on religious observances, but, as noted above, extreme religiosity had lost its need for reinforcement after the crisis had subsided.

Developments in the new government structure served to expand personal influence of the new chief above the purely community level. The Congress of Micronesia originally formed as a bicameral body with both elected representatives and traditional chiefs participants, but the roles of the chiefs receded in time, especially in the Ponape district (Meller 1969:123-127). But when the district legislature was reorganized in the context of the FSM, the two leading chiefs of each of the atolls in the district were drawn into the new body with full voting rights.⁵ There is no doubt that this move was a response to the continuing power and influence of the chiefs on Ponape itself and that the atolls were only incidentally involved in this restructuring, even though the result assured *ex officio* membership to the most important district body by the two leading chiefs of Pingelap. The religious conflicts on Pingelap lay quiescent in 1983 and the interaction of the Church with the traditional titles and of those two elements with elected government seemed to be functioning smoothly, though these relationships may be dynamic.⁶ Strong representation in the emerging post-Trust Territory government of Micronesia is especially important for the Pingelapese in view of reservations that have been expressed toward Ponapeans in particular and other Micronesians in general. There has always been a feeling that high islanders do not appreciate the special problems of atoll living and also that Ponapeans were condescending or exclusive in their dealings with the atoll dwellers.⁷ Reinforcement of representation by elected officials from Pingelap with the presence of the two leading traditional chiefs provides augmented assurance that the concerns of the islanders would be well defended against alien interests within the new government.

THE PINGELAPESE AND THE COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION

In order to appreciate Pingelapese attitudes toward possible changes in relations with the United States implied by any moves toward termination of the Trusteeship agreement, it is instructive to refer to the history of attitudes within Micronesia as a whole during the final years of trusteeship. As early as 1964, long before active moves toward independence or other alternatives began to gather force, a United Nations Visiting Mission reported that:

The people of the Territory have not yet begun to think at all widely about the range of alternatives open to them. . . . Since Micronesia is clearly not self-sufficient, most people concluded that the only alternative (to trusteeship) was some form of integration with the United States, either as a part of Hawaii or part of the Territory of Guam (United Nations 1964:56).

As conceptions of alternatives to trusteeship began to expand, discussions on Pingelap were characterized by suspicions of conflicting interests based on intraregional (Ponape district) and interregional (Trust Territory) rivalries regarding the issues at stake in achieving any of the various options of changed status. In general, pessimism over the wisdom of giving up trusteeship dominated these discussions which became increasingly charged emotionally. That such reactions were not peculiar to Pingelap can be seen from the report of another United Nations Visiting Mission:

With the exception of the people of the Northern Marianas Islands, the most usual reaction was one of fear. The ending of the period of trusteeship was seen not as a matter for celebration, but as an impending disaster which would deprive Micronesia of all economic support and technical advice. . . . At meetings with the general public in the municipalities it appeared that this fear had taken an extreme form. At Laura (Majuro) and Moen (Truk) among other places, the belief was expressed that at the moment of termination, the Territory would be abandoned and would receive no further aid from either the United States or the United Nations.

At Net (Ponape) the Mission was asked whether the Trusteeship Agreement could be terminated unilaterally against the wishes of the people. . . . In Palau, and also in many other places, the Mission was asked if the United Nations could provide aid for the territory after termination (United Nations 1980:104).

In time, debates over potential status changes came to focus more and more on the option of free association and on negotiations aimed at seeking to modify particulars of the Compact which had been proposed first by the U.S. in 1969 (Pacific Islands Monthly 1982a, 1982b; Micronesian Support Committee 1982:11-13, 19-28). By 1983 many of the elements which had earlier held out for more complete severance of ties with the U.S. were viewing adoption of the Compact as the most practical sort of compromise available. The chief problem that then faced Micronesian politicians and legislators was that of voters' education. As early as 1970 still another U.N. Visiting Mission had indicated the great difficulties that would be encountered in making clear options to trusteeship to the voting public of Micronesia. The Mission cited divisions of language, primary loyalties on local levels, lack of territory-wide political parties or widely read newspapers as factors impeding such understanding (United Nations 1970:142). Awareness of this problem led to organization of a public information program under a Plebiscite Commission which was formed in the spring of 1983. In connection with that program, a body of young men recruited from an educated elite, most of whom had been born on one or the other of the outer islands of the district, visited each of the atolls of the Ponape district in April and May. Their putative task was to present objectively the nature of the options that would be offered in the June 21 plebiscite. They explained the main points of the Compact of Free Association: (1) fifteen years of association with the United States during which definite sums of money would be allocated to the people of the former Trust Territory; (2) full sovereignty in internal and international affairs; and (3) delegation of defense responsibilities to the United States. The other alternatives which would be listed on the ballot—"Independence," "Commonwealth Status," "Statehood," or "Territory"—did not appear to me to have been presented in such neatly packaged or detailed form as was the Free Association option. Indeed, conversations with both several members of the commission and with Pingelapese on the atoll and on Ponape led me to believe that although there was emphatic denial on the part of members, and perhaps some honest efforts to compensate for such a tendency, the commission in effect represented a support medium for the Free Association option. Indeed, it was reported to me that this criticism had been raised both on outer islands and in the Pingelapese colony at Sokehs in Ponape. In addition, this objection emerged in my conversations on Pingelap several weeks prior to the voting.

In responding to the addresses of this information party, Pingelapese cited a new housing program which now supplied building material for people of retirement age on the atoll. They understood that the funds supporting this program had come directly from the U.S. Federal Housing Administration and not from a regular Micronesian budget. Concern was expressed that such programs might vanish under the terms of the Compact if accepted. Also expressed was the continuing anxiety that all U.S. and U.N. aid would end with the termination of the fifteen year period of the Compact. Among the circumstances under which American funds were provided in the past, by far the most important had been disaster relief in the wake of typhoons. The force of the destruction of winds and sea must be an overriding fear of many atoll dwellers.⁸

Suspicious regarding fair representation within the new Federated States of Micronesia came in the form of inquiries regarding the possibility of establishing separate political status for Ponape. The commission discounted this possibility, citing an unsuccessful attempt of the Faichuk Islands which had been denied such separate status within the Truk district (Micronesian Support Committee 1982:27). The small population of Pingelap was given as the disqualifying factor for such a move.

The Pingelapese were still discussing these and related matters, especially those concerning regrets over Free Association, when I visited the atoll in late May, three weeks before the voting took place. The eventual results of the plebiscite were as follows:⁹ (Yes) For Free Association 78; (No) Reject Free Association 190.

In addition to this basic vote, other options to Trusteeship were also voted on with the following results: Independence 15; Commonwealth Status 148; Territory 30; and State 32.

There are alternate interpretations of these votes. One that has been offered to explain the large number of "no" votes (51 per cent) in the State of Ponape has been lack of clarity regarding the Compact and unwillingness to vote in favor of a document which was not understood (The National Union 1983a).¹⁰ This response emerged despite an earlier statement by the Plebiscite Commission that the voter information program had not only been conducted fairly but "the objective of public information program and plebiscite were fully met" (The National Union 1983b:4).

Doubtless, the difficulties of legal language could not but have imposed stumbling blocks in attempts to explain the document on Pingelap as elsewhere. On the other hand, since the voter education party appears to have thrown its chief efforts into expounding the virtues of the Compact and indeed were criticized on Pingelap for doing so, it might just as cogently be argued that the "no" vote was a reaction to the pressures exerted toward its acceptance. I conducted no systematic poll at any time during my visits to Pingelap, but since most of the responses that I received over an eight year period regarding options in U.S.-Micronesian relations were critical of the Compact, the outcome of the voting was not a surprise.¹¹

I have argued that under American trusteeship the Pingelapese acknowledge having local improvements, a measure of security not before known on the atoll, positive personal relations with Americans and, despite some local reorganization along the lines of American ideals of representative government, they still retained a high degree of autonomy in local affairs. It is my view that rather than seeking a break with the most recent past, Pingelap wants continuity with and, if possible, expansion of benefits along the general lines familiar to them from the Trust Territory period without losing local autonomy. The majority of Pingelapese believe that these objectives can be met through tighter rather than looser ties with the United States. In terms of the plebiscite of June 1983, I suspect that the option of "Commonwealth Status" represents such a closer sort

of relationship. While I do not believe that the details of Commonwealth status are altogether clear to many of the Pingelapese, they do have the tangible example of acceptance of that status by the Northern Marianas (United Nations 1976:681) as representing a realized more complete unity with the United States.

CONCLUSION: AMERICAN POLICIES IN PINGELAPESE PERSPECTIVE

These interpretations of political developments in the microcosm of Pingelap might well be viewed as naive endorsement of United States policies in Micronesia. This position runs counter to a great deal of critical writing on American administration in the area (Wenkam 1971; McHenry 1975; Nevin 1977; Nufer 1978; Micronesian Support Committee 1982). One of the most important contributions to discussions of this policy is by Peoples (1978) who has applied the concept of dependency theory to Micronesia. Unlike more common versions of that body of theory, Peoples sees the area as not being exploited for exporting materials, but rather as forming a "pseudo welfare system" (Peoples 1978:545) with an increased appetite for imported goods existing but with no real development planned to create a visible and self-generating economy.

This portrayal strikes me as being a fitting characterization of United States past general policy in Micronesia. Indeed, Ponapeans and Pingelapese living on Ponape have remarked to me about the lack of plans to develop agriculture or commercial fishing industries by American administrators. Surely such developments must be regarded as feasible mainly on the richer high islands of Micronesia. Pingelapese on the atoll do not perceive the existing dependency negatively. It is difficult for them to see how productivity could be raised above a subsistence level on their overcrowded island, or how their increasing material wants can be satisfied alone by the chief established cash income source, the fluctuating market of the copra industry. Economic opportunity for the youth is based on emigration for training and eventual employment away from Pingelap. For those who remain behind, a modest flow of money from those thus employed, together with whatever other funds are appropriated by Americans, appear to provide the only sources of economic expansion or even maintenance.

Certainly, terms like "independence," "sovereignty," or "self-rule," which are the shiboleths of political action groups in Micronesia, have little meaning for the Pingelapese given their history of virtual autonomy. The concerns of Palauans over the consequences of a once-planned superport, of the Marshallese regarding the dangers of bomb and missile testing, or the possible harmful effects of nuclear powered warships operating in the area are all remote from their world. Even though the pressures on land are great on the atoll, the issue of eminent domain is not imminent for there is little likelihood of Pingelap being converted into a military base.

The character of their local concerns can be extracted from the comments of their new chief to the Vice President of FSM when he visited Pingelap on August 31, 1981: (1) concern for the lack of weekend supervision for Pingelapese high school students on Ponape; (2) need for funds to support repair of the sea wall; (3) additional funds to make possible completion of the air strip; and (4) distress at the Reagan administration policy on family feeding programs (The National Union 1981).

These perceptions of needs have a specifically Pingelapese flavor and reflect the parochial nature of outer island views. At the same time, several also relate to the more general fear—eventual withholding of American funds. This anxiety may not be without basis in fact since it now appears that the U.S. Termination policy which raised such storms of protest from American Indian groups (Lurie 1961; Brophy and Aberle 1966), may be reappearing in the form of some of the conditions attendant to the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement (Burch 1984). Although the Compact provides for commitment of funds for the entire

fifteen-year period of the agreement, even though any party may otherwise withdraw before the end of that time (Compact of Free Association 1982:59), there is no provision for any support by the U.S. beyond that point.

Finally, viewed within the context of the new Federated States of Micronesia and its relationship with the United States as established in the Compact, what are the conditions that must be maintained and, if possible, be improved in order that the Pingelapese may enjoy the well-being and the hope which they conceive to have been their situation under Trust Territory administration? First, autonomy in internal affairs must be upheld by whatever legal code and judicial structure emerges. Second, there must be a continued, and if possible, expanded flow of capital to the atoll for improvements and services. Third, their elected and ascribed delegates must be successful in insuring these conditions and other interests, especially those peculiar to atoll living, in the face of possible dominance of policies and politics by representatives of the district centers.

NOTES

1. Field work on Pingelap and Ponape was supported in 1975-76, 1980, and 1983 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. A grant by the Arts Research Board of McMaster University assisted me in my 1978 trip to the area. I thank these agencies as well as the gracious people of Pingelap for their assistance. An earlier version of this paper was read at the 15th Pacific Science Conference in Dunedin, New Zealand, February 2, 1983.
2. According to Eilenberg (1982:62), who also published previously classified memoranda on the subject, the report of the Solomon Team was not meant for public consumption but was leaked to a popular Micronesian magazine and then later republished by McHenry (1975).
3. There is only one brief and ambiguous reference to religious freedom in the *Code of the Trust Territory*: "No law shall be enacted in the Trust Territory respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise of or abridging of freedom of speech . . ." (Steincipher 1970:5).
4. "Custom is clearly established . . . thus enforceable under the Criminal Code of the Trust Territory," E. F. Granatti, Associate Justice, Nov. 20, 1979 (in referring to Trust Territory of the Pacific Criminal Appeal no. 57-79).
5. The two chiefs from Pingelap had begun to meet in the spring of 1983 with the Constitutional Convention which was to form the new Legislature of the State of Ponape. Later that year the *Mwoalen Wabu* or Council of High Chiefs was designated as "the honorary joint head of state" to "give advice on all major issues . . . assist in upholding the customs and traditions . . . and would be funded by state government law" (The National Union 1983c:2).
6. There appears to be significant variation in local reintegration of politics on the outer islands. For Namu atoll in the Marshalls, Rynkiewich (1974) speaks of local politics as "ossified" into a stalemate between the elected magistrate and council on the one hand, and the traditional leadership on the other. Nason (1974) writes that on Etal in the western Carolines traditional leadership has been eclipsed by the elected magistrate who has in effect become the paramount chief with some of the prerogatives of that title. Elsewhere (Damas 1983:14-15) I have discussed the recent political history of Mokil where the traditional titles have been completely replaced by elective government. In none of these cases did the power of the local mission appear to have reached the level seen on Pingelap.
7. The most tangible expression of exclusiveness is the low rate of intermarriage between Ponapeans and outer islanders. In the village of Mwalok, which is the Pingelapese colony in Sokehs, Ponape, of 113 existing marriages in 1983 only three were between Pingelapese (either those born in the colony or on the atoll) and Ponapeans.
8. Two recent examples highlight the importance of relief funds to cover such disasters. A typhoon on Kuttu in the Mortlocks flooded the taro patch and still in 1982 (The National Union 1982b) the island was unable to raise enough taro and breadfruit to feed the population. On Nukuoro a similar situation occurred in that year when, due to drought, salt water seeped into the taro patch and killed most of the plants (The National Union 1982c). Both situations required special relief funds.
9. Breakdown of the voting within the Ponape district has not been published. I was able to get these figures from Larry Lundstrom and Nancy Lee.
10. On September 2, 1983, the Ponape State Legislature voted 17 to 2 to disapprove the Compact citing among other reasons, "brevity of the educational process" (The National Union 1983a:5). On the same day, their Senator reversed this decision in FSM Congress in order to make acceptance of the Compact unanimous within the four states of FSM. In doing so, however, he commented that "although the Compact is a masterpiece of legal literature, we do not understand it, and probably will never understand it" (The National Union 1983a:4).
11. Mason (1974:229) points out that "there are two worlds of Micronesia—the district center and the outer islands. The life style, orientation, satisfactions, and problems of the one are not at all the same as those of the other." While the Micronesian atolls do share common problems and concerns,

it should not be assumed that they would respond to the challenge of the voting on the Compact in identical manner. Factors of the unique histories of each of the outer islands must be considered in analyzing the responses to the notion of Free Association and the other options offered in the Plebiscite of 1983. Personal experiences with Americans, success of local improvement projects supported by American funds, responses to local and district center political pressures, as well as to the voter education groups are among these.

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