

Committee Lists Alternatives For Future Status of Guam

One of the upshots of the First Constitutional Convention of Guam's preliminary proceedings, totally unexpected by the Tenth Legislature which created it, is the Political Status Committee of the Convention organization.

Creation of the committee, apparently, opens up the whole question of what Guam's future status within the American political system and indeed whether the future shall be within the American system shall be. This hitherto had been considered a matter of evolution, patience and the pleasure of the U.S. Congress.

But, now that the question has been opened, the committee is seeking opinions from the citizens on which way to go. The committee, headed by Adrian Sanchez, with Joe San Agustin, Jose C. Quintinilla, Betty Guerrero, Jose R. Rivera, Charles F. Toves, Jesus S. Camacho, David Terlaje and Joaquin G. Blas as members offers five alternatives — including independence and affiliation with another country — for consideration.

But it comments, deadpan: "Naturally, some of the more radical changes in status, such as independence or affiliation with another nation, would have most profound effects on all aspects of Guam life. These observations are confined to the political and legal effects only."

A brief summary of the observations:

1. Incorporated Territory.

The committee points out that following the exact path set by Hawaii and Alaska en route to statehood might involve some "steps" backward, since both as incorporated territories had Presidentially-appointed governors. Nothing in the U.S. Constitution, however, prohibits an incorporated territory from having the form of government Guam now has under the amended Organic Act of 1950.

The overriding advantage, the committee points out, is that such incorporation is an implicit promise of eventual statehood. But this took a long, long time for Alaska and Hawaii. A further disadvantage is the possibility that income taxes might not, as now, be remitted to the government of Guam, and federal excise and luxury taxes might be imposed here, as well as tariffs. Thus Guam would cease to be a duty-free port. At the same time, there would be no increases in political rights or autonomy in incorporated status.

2. Statehood

This, the committee points out, would give the people of Guam and their government full parity and equal rights with the people of the 50 states, including the vote for President, representation in Congress. At the same time, the full burden of the federal tax system would be imposed and the government of Guam would probably be forced to impose new taxes for its own operations. And these operations would be more expensive, since many services, such as the court system, would have to be revamped at once. All in all, desirable.

3. Commonwealth Status

Under a commonwealth statute worked out between Guam and the Congress, the island could have "as much political autonomy as it could handle," says the committee's dopesheet. The only present Commonwealth in the U.S. system is Puerto Rico, which has an elected governor, makes its own laws (including legalized gambling) and pays no federal taxes. A Resident Commissioner (non-voting) sits in the U.S. House of Representatives and speaks for Puerto Rico. Arrangements with the former Commonwealth of the Philippines were much different, so it is anticipated that Guam could work out a unique and suitable agreement if the Commonwealth form were adapted.

4. Independence.

This could mean anything, the committee says, from an "ideal democratic system as freely chosen by the people themselves" to a "corrupt and inefficient administration, followed by economic chaos and then military dictatorship where all political rights are lost." The chances for disaster appear to be greater in such a setup, says the committee, and despite the temptation to make up for loss of federal revenues by leasing the bases here to the U.S. government at a realistic rental, the idea does not seem to be seriously proposed.

5. Affiliation with another nation.

The committee appears to feel that affiliation with Japan or the Philippines, for example, would lead to political regression in the first case and economic disaster on the other. Australia and New Zealand are more like it, but the best deal of all appears to be to maintain relations with the United States.

All of which will probably make Washington sleep more comfortably.