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"Enabling the Entrance Into the 20th Century"  
(TASC)

I would like to call your attention to a paper called "Marshallese Human Development Inkind Needs," which you received last night. This paper outlines an arena in which we can all participate --out of our garages, out of our homes, or as families--in a very significant manner, to see that one part of the Human Development Program comes off. People do not operate in a vacuum. They need capital goods, and the goods needed for some of these projects to come off are enumerated here.

Out of the 22 major programs of the Marshall Islands Human Development Program, if we do not "pull off" the Inter-Island Transportation System, we might just as well not have gone to Majuro at all! I would suggest that you talk to your boat-owning friends to find out who owns a big boat. In an intentional conversation, you might suggest to such a person that there is a place where his big boat could be used. He could retain ownership of the boat, donate it to receive a tax deduction, or lease it for a dollar. We will give him the "edge" on Uncle Sam while he fills a critical need. I would suggest that you do that next week!

I have been terrified twice within the short period of six months since the Marshall Islands project was launched. The first time was on the Consult when we realized that what we were doing was really serious business and that in this particular geographic location, there was no way to come back or change any of the points of the program. That was it! On Thursday night of the five day stay, there was not one person smiling; there was not one person who felt comfortable.

We were all terror-filled with the realization that we had taken upon ourselves the responsibility for enabling a Third World nation to enter and participate in the 20th Century. The only alternative to slavery is for Majuro to enter the 20th Century. It had to be done; otherwise, the 20th Century would take over, and the Marshallese people would be servants of those who had taken over -- as indeed they are now.

When I returned, I learned something else. If people in the Third World are to enter the 20th Century, those of us living in the developed world must inescapably participate with them. We have no choice, no matter what programs or what training we provide for them. There is no way for them to enter the business world unless they have business colleagues or ways of dialoguing with the Western business world community.

Now my report. A company called TASC has been formed in the Marshall Islands. One of its objectives is to provide food and other staple goods through volume buying. TASC faces a tremendous job in organizing the merchants, getting them to work together, and to learn inventory and inventory control.

I have discovered that the Marshallese have no concern if they are paying 10 percent interest on goods that sit on a shelf for ten months. It makes no difference to them if there is an abundance of flour, but no rice to sell. They need to be organized, they need to be trained, and they need the major efforts of TASC.

I discovered in working on this, that the food industry operates on a very low profit margin, but not in Majuro. The suppliers who do business out there take advantage of a captive audience which does not know the best place to shop. It soon became apparent, in that context, that an economic enterprise in a developed country was needed to serve Majuro in the same way that a supplier would service Safeway.

It also became obvious that this would have to be a full-time enterprise, and that somebody had to do it. That was the second episode of terror in the last six months for me.

This weekend, a small group of colleagues has been creating the strategy and operating principles for a commercial enterprise which could rapidly begin to enable programs such as Majuro to come off. This work is not complete and it is not entirely satisfactory, by any means. It will begin by dealing with strategic buying and it will expand to fill other needs of Majuro. There is a great need right now for communication in a business-like manner between developed nations and Majuro, and especially among the business community and small groups.

We have completed the work of this weekend. It needs polish, and we have gone through this process three or four times meeting elsewhere. I look forward to reporting on the success of this venture to you at the next Guardians' Consult.

--Jon Thorssen  
April 11, 1975