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No One Warned the Micronesians

ROGER W. GALE

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When the first postwar atomic bomb was to be tested on Bikini in the summer of 1946, the people of Rongelap atoll, about 100 miles away, were evacuated as a precaution. But on March 1, 1954, when Bravo, the first deliverable thermonuclear weapon (H-bomb)—750 times more powerful and much dirtier than the earlier bombs—was detonated on Bikini, the people of Rongelap were left there as sitting ducks. Winds aloft carried radioactivity eastward, heavily contaminating the eighty-two people on Rongelap as well as the twenty-three Japanese fishermen aboard the *Lucky Dragon*; 154 other Marshallese and twenty-eight Americans were also doused with fallout. The nightmare of that day is still with the Rongelapese. The latest victim is 19-year-old Lekoj Anjain who died recently of acute myelogenous leukemia. Now that American rule of Micronesia, derived from a Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations, may be about to end, the Marshallese are no longer willing to be used as guinea pigs by researchers from the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission. Last year, when AEC doctors arrived to conduct their annual survey the Marshallese victims refused to submit to examination.

Early on that first day of March the people of Rongelap saw a brilliant flash in the western sky. Running out of their houses to the beach they saw an enormous pillar of yellowish fire rising in the sky. Soon the weather seemed to change; the sky darkened and a storm appeared imminent. Several hours after the explosion, the atoll was suddenly enveloped in a heavy mist and particles of highly radioactive coral ash which had been sucked up from Bikini and suspended 100,000 feet in the air, began to fall like snow.

There was no immediate sickness but by nightfall, a few hours after the storm ended, people's skin began to itch and sting; some of them had burning eyes and almost all of them were nauseated. They were very tired, lost their appetites and soon had diarrhea. Burn lesions began to appear on their bodies the next day and most of them started losing clumps of hair, some of them becoming temporarily bald.

The people of Utirik, farther from the Bravo blast, did not see any ash but developed similar symptoms although they did not receive anywhere near the 175 rads of whole body radiation which penetrated the Rongelapese. The twenty-eight Americans on an island near Rongelap had been briefed on what to do. They put on extra clothing and took cover when the blast went off; consequently they were not seriously injured. No one had warned the Micronesians.

Two days after the test, the people were evacuated by Navy ship to Kwajalein where they received medical attention; the day before, a ship had by-passed Rongelap

to evacuate the twenty-eight Americans. The first public announcement about the blast, issued by the Atomic Energy Commission on March 11, bore little resemblance to the facts of the tragedy.

During the course of a routine atomic test in the Marshall Islands 28 United States personnel and 236 residents were transported from neighboring atolls to Kwajalein Island according to a plan as a precautionary measure. These individuals were unexpectedly exposed to some radioactivity. There were no burns. All reported well. After the completion of the atomic tests, the natives will be returned to their homes.

In fact, *the test was not routine*. Bravo was the first of its kind, the first of a series and the first to have been detonated on Bikini in eight years. *The people had not been moved before the test and there were beta burns*. The Rongelapese *did not return home* after the tests, they spent three and a half years in exile waiting for their island to "cool off" to a point where it was even minimally safe for rehabilitation.

Robert Conard, the Brookhaven National Laboratory's expert on Rongelap and Utirik, said that unexposed Rongelapese who returned with the contaminated population in 1957 made an "ideal comparison population" for studying radiation effects. They have been convenient guinea pigs for AEC research, being the only population to have been exposed to high-level, whole-body radiation without also suffering physical and psychological trauma from the nuclear blast itself as had been the case in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Other than the crew of the *Lucky Dragon*, they remain the only people to have been heavily contaminated by fallout from an H-bomb with its exceptionally complex patterns of radioactive dispersion.

Was the exposure of the Marshallese really an accident? Micronesian Congressman Ataji Balos charges that the Marshallese were deliberately contaminated. Paul Jacobs has published evidence that the AEC may have deliberately contaminated American soldiers during nuclear weapons tests in Nevada. There was a great deal of carelessness in the Marshalls and a willingness to take risks with the brown-skinned Marshallese that would not normally have been acceptable in Nevada, where most other nuclear tests have occurred. All of the large nuclear blasts were detonated on either Bikini or Eniwetok because these sites are 500 miles or more from busy air and sea routes. But, as in Nevada, there were small population centers within the danger area of the blasts. In fact, there are probably more isolated locations in Nevada than there are in the Marshalls. The danger zone around Bikini was enlarged eight times *after* the Bravo test, but its eastward boundary conveniently excluded populated islands. One island, Ailinginae, was geographically within the prohibited zone but not so included on AEC maps. The twenty-eight Americans who were contaminated, as well as eighteen of the Rongelapese, were on Ailinginae on March 1, 1954.

Some of the effects of radiation may not have been included in the Rongelapese until years after they returned home, according to some Japanese radiation experts. In 1957, when the AEC moved them back, Rongelap still retained high background levels of radioactivity, and the AEC, which usually plays down radiation dangers, reported that "there was obviously a certain degree of uncertainty" about the safety of food grown on the island. Only last October did the AEC announce that coconut crabs, a delicacy in the Marshalls, could be eaten; even now they are not safe for regular consumption. The fallout from Bravo killed many chickens and pigs on the island and vegetation still shows signs of radiation-induced mutations. After the return home, levels of radiation in individuals' bodies increased drastically, and even those who had not been on the island in 1954 were soon showing much higher radiation counts than other Marshallese, despite the fact that almost all Marshallese had relatively high radiation counts as a result of widespread fallout from the tests. Strontium 90 levels went up six times, cesium 137 levels went up sixty times. Even previously uncontaminated people had strontium 90 and cesium 137 levels ten times higher than other Marshallese who were used as a control group. How much strontium 90 is safe is unknown, the AEC having almost doubled the "permissible" dosages, without explanation, when strontium 90 levels rose dramatically, almost to the danger point, in the height of American, Russian and British nuclear testing. In 1963, radiation levels of the people on Rongelap were about 100 times that of the average "uncontaminated" Japanese.

The Japanese Government received \$2 million in compensation for the *Lucky Dragon* from the United States Government one year after the tragedy, the biggest part of that going, not to the victims but to the Japanese tuna industry. Only eighty-nine of the Marshallese have ever received compensation and only after they protested to the United Nations and threatened to take legal action. The United States awarded them about

\$950,000 in 1962. The Marshallese are now demanding additional compensation for severe aftereffects now being felt for the first time. The worst of these—leukemia, thyroid cancer and cataracts—may still appear in any numbers. Leko Anjain, who died in a U.S. hospital, is the first victim to be found with leukemia.

Almost every child (89.5 per cent) who was contaminated in 1954 has had thyroid abnormalities of some sort. Many of them have been sent to U.S. hospitals for surgery. The first case of thyroid tumor was not detected until 1964; since then there have been more than twenty additional cases, including two new cases of thyroid tumors found this year. Three of the tumors have been cancerous. Almost all children have at least slight growth retardation and there are some cases of severe stunting. One 12-year-old child, for example, was the size of a 5-year-old before receiving hormone treatment.

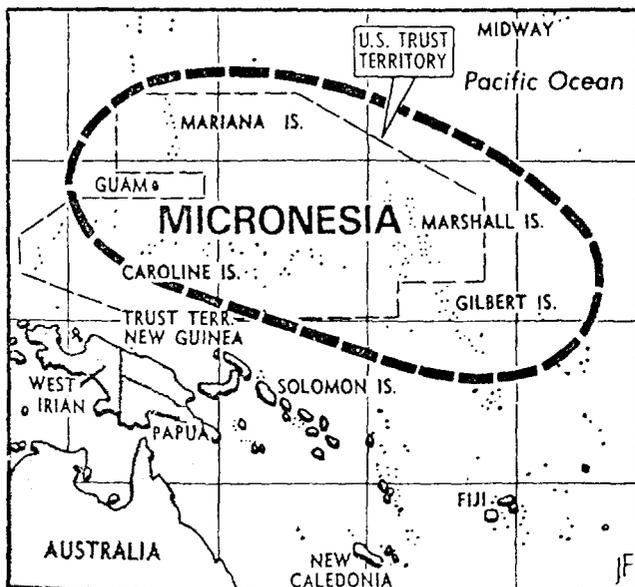
The number of stillbirths in the years after the bomb was about double that for the rest of the Marshalls. The annual death rate for the Marshalls (as of 1963) was 8.3 per 1,000; for Rongelap it was 13 per 1,000. Yet the AEC has consistently refused to accept a connection between any of these deaths and the effects of radiation. It is still too early to tell how much the bomb has shortened the life span of the victims.

All of the victims, even those without obvious illnesses, are forced to take many kinds of medications and many are abnormally susceptible to colds, flu and throat ailments. Most of them still tire easily and almost all worry about their health. As Ataji Balos recently told an audience in Tokyo, "Each person who has been exposed asks himself: 'Will I be well tomorrow? Will my children be normal?' And when he becomes ill he asks himself, 'Is this an ordinary illness, or has the ghost of the bomb come to claim me now—even years after?'"

The medical treatment the victims have received is grossly inadequate. There is no doctor on either Rongelap or Utiirik, and Micronesians are not permitted to use the facilities of the army hospital on Kwajalein. There is a small hospital on Majuro, where some of the victims now live, but none of the staff is trained in radiation treatment. For any major problem, the victims must travel almost 1,500 miles to Guam, or even farther to Honolulu.

Once a year a team of Atomic Energy Commission doctors have examined them and collected data for AEC files. This is in contrast to Japan where victims receive four examinations a year and have medical treatment whenever necessary. The Rongelapese have never been given diagnoses of their illnesses. They are merely prescribed pills which are dispensed by a local medical practitioner, or sent to the United States for surgery. In the nineteen years since the disaster, only AEC doctors have been allowed to examine and treat the victims, although in December 1971 a team of doctors from the Japan Congress Against A- and H-Bombs attempted to examine them at the invitation of members of the Congress of Micronesia. The American Government threw them out before they could complete their work.

When the AEC team arrived in March 1972, for its annual visit, the Marshallese refused to submit to examinations unless independent doctors took part and unless they were guaranteed individual diagnoses. As a result,



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the team left without examining anyone, but returned in September with consultants from Japan, the U.S. Public Health Service and the World Health Organization. Each of the consultants is writing a critique of AEC procedures. In addition, under pressure from the Congress of Micronesia, an AEC physician will be stationed on Kwajalein next year and will make periodic visits to Rongelap and Utirik. But this does not come anywhere near solving the problem of twenty years of insensitive, inadequate treatment. The Marshallese fear for the future, especially now that leukemia has developed and now that bomb-induced illnesses are on the increase among second-generation victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

It is a great irony that these people, who are among the most isolated in the world, should be the first to preview World War III. Although nuclear bombs are no longer tested in the Marshalls, their delivery systems are. ICBMs from Vandenburg Air Force Base in California are aimed at the Marshalls where, after a 5,000-mile flight across the Pacific, they are fired on by Spartan and Sprint missiles launched from Kwajalein. To make room for U.S. missile facilities, the people of Kwajalein were shunted to Ebeye, an overcrowded, vermin-infested island with the highest disease rate in Micronesia.

The people of Bikini and Eniwetok, the old bomb sites, have been in exile since the late 1940s. In both cases public announcements of the impending weapons tests were made in the United States weeks before the islanders themselves were told of their coming evictions. The Bikinians were given two weeks' notice that, in the Navy's words, they were like the children of Israel, to be "saved from their enemy and led into the Promised Land." They were gathered together after church and instructed to talk among themselves and take a vote on whether or not to leave their island. In the meantime, the Navy was preparing to blast channels and build test facilities, and cameramen were arriving to film the historic event. What would have happened if they had voted not to move? Seven years later they did just that when the U.S. Government sought to take away their legal title to Bikini forever. Some of the Bikinians were coerced into signing but soon renounced their agreement; the Navy then had a traditional chief of the Marshalls, whose power was no longer recognized, sign the island away for them.

They were removed first to an uninhabitable island where for two years they lived on a starvation diet. When it became clear that they were dying and that "native indolence" was not to blame, they were packed up again and after a couple of abortive moves finally settled on Kili, an almost inaccessible island in the southern Marshalls. The ecology was amazingly different from Bikini, where subsistence was based largely on fishing. On Kili, fishing was often impossible and people had to learn for themselves how to survive in an agriculturally based economy. As a result, they suffered periodic malnutrition for many years. At one point in 1948, the Bikinians were ready to be redispaced to Ujelang, another inhospitable atoll, but at the last minute the Navy decided to move the Eniwetokese there instead, despite the fact that Bikinian workmen had already been building new homes for themselves on the island. In an extraordinary disregard

for human rights, the Bikinians were repeatedly displaced with almost no notice and with no right to legal appeal, and twice they were left to starve.

In the recent past, with carefully timed political announcements, the Americans officially returned Bikini and Eniwetok to the people. Three of the islands in the Eniwetok atoll were vaporized by the first H-bomb; on the others it is still necessary to wear a radiation badge. A large portion of one island in Eniwetok is covered by a mantle of highly toxic beryllium, left behind by NASA experimenters. Neither Bikini nor Eniwetok has any palm trees left, or much other edible food; it will take at least eight to ten years for the islanders to become self-sufficient. Nevertheless, the people are eager to return home.

After the official announcement that Eniwetok was to be returned to its owners at the end of 1973, it became known that the Air Force planned a series of tremendously destructive "Pacific Atoll Cratering Experiments" designed to simulate the effect of an H-bomb explosion on land. The biggest of the twenty-one TNT tests would alone dig a crater 300 feet in diameter and 50 feet deep. An Air Force spokesman suggested that the craters would make ideal harbors for the Eniwetokese. Testing was stopped, however, in October by Federal District Court in Honolulu because the Air Force had begun preparation for the tests and conducted some of them without filing a proper Environmental Impact statement and without consulting the Eniwetokese. Two other classified activities, known only as "Colonel Russel's Project" and "Senior Girl" are under way on the island. The United States has refused to reveal how long these projects will take to complete.

The order restraining the Air Force from making tests on Eniwetok was the first occasion that a U.S. court accepted a case brought by Micronesian plaintiffs. Under U.S. administration, Micronesians have been pushed around with impunity, since they had no effective legal recourse against eminent domain proceedings, eviction, or against the construction of military bases. As much as 60 per cent of some islands is retained by the United States, most of it valuable agricultural land, now kept idle. Last July it became known that the military proposes to retain "rights" for continued use of parts of Bikini, despite its return to its owners. Although the Trusteeship Agreement charges the United States with the responsibility for "protecting the inhabitants against the loss of their lands and resources," the United States has blatantly evicted Micronesians and taken their land for pseudo-public purposes.

Micronesia is the only one of the eleven original post-war trust territories, set up under the United Nations, that has not been guaranteed its independence. Last summer the Congress of Micronesia voted to begin negotiating for independence, and a majority of the Congress expressed opposition to previous agreements reached with the United States which would perpetually subject Micronesia to U.S. strategic interests. As a result, the United States has called a halt to talks and has warned Micronesia that under no circumstances would it agree to termination of the trusteeship under conditions which would "in any way threaten stability in the area and which would in the

opinion of the United States endanger international peace and security." U.S. policy has been to maintain "a lasting political partnership" with Micronesia, especially now that the United States not only proposes to retain many of its facilities in the Marshalls but also has plans to construct new military bases in the Marianas and Carolines, made necessary by the reversion of Okinawa to Japan and political instability in the Philippines.

This month, a four-man mission of the U.N. Trusteeship Council will be in Micronesia, to study how well the United States has guarded the interests of its wards. Such missions have visited Micronesia every three years, but now for the first time a Russian will be a member of the group, and the highest ranking Chinese at the U.N.—

Tang Ming-chao, under-secretary general for trusteeships and decolonization affairs—may go along on his own.

Nuclear war has already begun for the Marshallese, and nothing can end the suffering of the people of Rongelap and Utirik, or bring back twenty-five years of exile to the people of Kwajalein, Bikini and Eniwetok. Independence will not overcome past suffering but it may prevent new victims. The Micronesians are finally demanding better treatment and feel strong enough to have now decided to negotiate for independence, but they have received little help from Americans who for the most part are unwilling to puncture the romantic bubble that makes them think of the islands as paradises where conflict and suffering are unknown. □

CORPORATE SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL WELFARE

The business corporation is, of course, this country's most potent institution. From early modest beginnings, corporations have flourished, multiplied, spread across the land and overseas and become steadily more impressive in terms of accumulated holdings, production, sales and profits. Yet, as a social institution, the corporation has received nothing like the critical scrutiny it deserves. Now the "problem" has taken on new dimensions with the rise of multinational, transnational corporations and conglomerates. Without restraints and social controls, corporations are programmed, like a giant computer, to produce, accumulate and expand without limit. A subcommittee chaired by Sen. Frank Church is undertaking a study of the multinational corporation; it promises to be one of the most important inquiries of the new Congress.

In a recent speech in Chicago, Senator Church pointed out that foreign investments by American-owned corporations have outstripped the growth rate of international trade and overall world output. By the close of 1972, such corporations ended up with nearly \$107 billion worth of direct foreign investment on their books and probably double that amount in world sales. The over-

seas production of these firms ranks in total magnitude next to the gross national product of the United States and the Soviet Union. "What, then," Senator Church asks, "is the role of the states, of traditional political authority, faced with an economic force which refuses to recognize constraints and frontiers?"

It is not merely that these corporations exert a powerful influence on the world's economy and present special problems to the host countries in which they operate and to the developing nations; they also present a basic problem for domestic economic policy. International political controls will come only slowly; in the meantime urgent issues need to be faced. For example, labor is naturally concerned about loss of jobs when for the period from 1959 through 1970, our unemployment rate averaged 2.4 times as high as the weighted average rate of six of our major trading partners: Japan, Britain, France, Sweden, West Germany and Italy. Eventually an integrated international business system will no doubt emerge; meanwhile "the global corporation" demands close scrutiny. The two articles that follow deal with closely related aspects of the problem which Senator Church's subcommittee will explore.

I. The Multinational Computer

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The world's political leaders face increasingly difficult problems of economic stabilization and control. There are all the usual difficulties associated with growth and cycles—inflation, unemployment, and adverse balances of trade or payments—but, in addition, a corporate structure that has emerged in the last few years transcends national boundaries and commands enough economic power to

put it largely beyond national control. Political institutions have made only partial adjustments to the new situation, so national leaders resort to stratagems that divide rather than unify the nations. The result is that they and the public needs they serve are ever more subordinated to the impersonal rule of the international business system.

Strong tides of economic nationalism and protectionism are manifest in all parts of the world. In the United States, the New Economic Policy, devaluation, and the insistence on import quotas in key industries are parts of the picture.