

# Radiation victims speak out

by Glenn Alcalay

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I recently returned from a research field trip in the Marshall Islands where I conducted many interviews with people who are continuing to suffer the long-term effects from radiation in the aftermath of the United States' atomic testing program in the Pacific. I met with people from Utirik, Wotje, Ebeye and Majuro on their respective atolls, and I was able to learn about some of the ongoing problems and consequent fears and anxieties plaguing these victims of U. S. militarism.

While on Ebeye Island (in Kwajalein Atoll), I spoke with Jabwe Joyr - the magistrate of Rongelap Atoll - who expressed much fear and apprehension concerning his people who remain on Rongelap. Jabwe explained that since the time of the Department of Energy aerial radiation survey of the Northern Marshalls in 1978, the DOE had placed a quarantine on the northern half of Rongelap Atoll, and since 1978 the people of Rongelap are not allowed to reside or collect food or crops from the quarantined area. As Jabwe explained, the fish circulate throughout the Rongelap lagoon (as do other foods in the Marshallese diet) and now the people of Rongelap are quite concerned about eating contami-

nated foods from their lagoon.

Jabwe said that the Rongelap people are really frightened about remaining on Rongelap now, and asked me if there was anything that we could do to insure the safety of the people still on Rongelap. I suggested that we obtain the raw data from the 1978 DOE survey and have independent scientists - i.e., scientists not affiliated with an agency or laboratory of the U. S. government - assess the raw data and make recommendations to the people of Rongelap concerning whether they should remain there, or evacuate due to dangerous levels of residual radiation on their atoll. Currently, attorneys working with the Atomic Testing Litigation Project in the Marshalls are trying to force the DOE to surrender the raw data, and when they get the data it will be distributed to such groups as Physicians for Social Responsibility and other respected scientists for their review.

Jabwe's fears about Rongelap are certainly justified in light of the recent disclosure by the DOE that several atolls - if not all - of the Northern Marshalls contain varying levels of residual radiation from the testing era, in addition to several cases of thyroid abnormalities occurring in atolls other than Rongelap and

Utirik, where doctors and scientists from Brookhaven National Laboratory have narrowly focused their past studies.

On Utirik, I spoke with Emto Kel, a victim of the fallout, who has recently had his thyroid removed. In an interview Emto said:

"I now believe that the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) scientists used us and the people from Rongelap in an experiment to test 'the bomb.' When the U. S. first went to the moon they sent a dog so that in case something went wrong it would not hurt people. The same thing happened when they tested bombs in our islands because they considered that we were like animals and were of no importance."

When I spoke with Nine Letobo from Utirik about her perceptions of the radiation problems, she told me that:

"The AEC doctors treat us as if we were animals for their use and they do not tell us the truth about our problems. Could you please help us to find honest doctors to tell us the truth about our sicknesses? I also believe that all of the Marshall Islands have 'poison,' and I now believe that the AEC doctors have been keeping secrets from us for many years about our condi-

tion."

While on Ebeye, I talked with Almira Matayoshi from Rongelap who conveyed the following:

"In 1978 I was in Japan to attend an anti-bomb conference. At Nagasaki and Hiroshima hospitals we visited the bomb victims. The people told us of some women who had committed suicide because they felt they were in prison and could not visit their relatives. This is the same feeling we now have living on Ebeye due to our inability to visit our families on Rongelap where we refuse to live because of the 'poison.'"

"The U. S. tested bombs here because of the expanse of ocean and because our islands were suitable for testing. They did not care about the people in the Marshalls - they think they are something to use for testing. It is just like what the French are doing to the people of Tahiti, and some of those people were put into prison for protesting."

John Anjain, who was magistrate of Rongelap in 1954 during the fallout from "Bravo," explained in an interview that:

"From the beginning of the testing program in our islands the U. S. has treated us like animals in a scientific experiment for their studies. They come and study us like animals and think of us as 'guinea pigs.' We are the 'guinea pigs.'"

The lawsuits being filed for personal injuries and property damage on behalf of the Marshallese by the lawyers of the Marshall Islands Atomic Testing Litigation Project will reverse the tragic and pernicious effects of radiation. However, if the Marshall Islanders succeed in winning a settlement from the

U. S., there are some positive and constructive ways to use the money in the future.

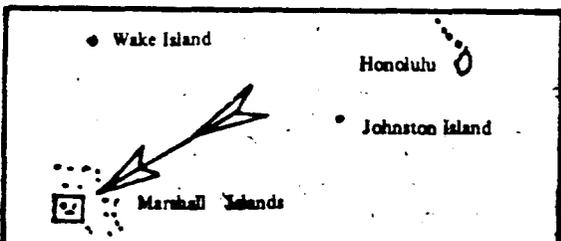
For instance, the Marshallese feel very strongly about the need for independent doctors and scientists to help them with their ongoing radiation problems. It is feasible that an independent team of doctors could provide them with the compassionate and comprehensive medical care that has been so lacking in the past. It is true that even the best medical treatment cannot undo the latent effects or genetic damage from radiation, but an independent group of doctors can at least stem some of the fears and anxieties caused by the callous and negligent treatment by the Brookhaven doctors in the past.

Additionally, it is quite possible that some of the money from the settlement could be used to establish a small-scale fishing industry for some of the outer islands in the Marshalls. The United Nations Development Program has recently instituted a pilot project in India using flat-hulled fiberglass skiffs which use five-horsepower diesel engines. These small skiffs cost about \$7,000 and require little maintenance and are ideally suited for lagoon fishing. Small deep freeze units, powered by solar energy where alternative energy using photovoltaics and wind generators are perfectly suited for tropical localities in the Trade Winds region.

(Glenn Alcalay was a Peace Corps Volunteer on Utirik Atoll in the Marshall Islands, 1975 - 1977. He has represented the Utirik Council in U. S. Congressional Hearings and is currently a Ph. D. candidate in Anthropology at Rutgers University.)

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## \$532,200 approved for students

SAIPAN - Gov. Carlos Camacho said this week on Saipan that on Aug. 21, 1981, he signed Public Law 2-22 appropriating \$532,200 in Fiscal Year 1981 for financial aid to Northern Marianas students attending post-secondary schools abroad.

He said applications for CNMI students are reviewed by a special committee of the Northern Marianas Board of Education.

On Aug. 21, the committee approved 114 applications and disapproved 25, the Governor said. Seven of those 25 were disapproved because of the applicants' low grade point average and 12 because the applicants were part-time rather than full-time students. The other six were already on education/training leave and were not all-

far, which have yet to be acted on.

The Governor said the Board of Education has awarded \$129,125 to students abroad, and up until Aug. 10, 1981, when the board took over the administration of financial aid program from the municipal governments, a total of \$244,282 had been awarded, which would leave a balance of about \$148,000 yet to be awarded in FY 1981.

In a related matter, Rep. Felicidad Ogunoro, Chairperson of the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare, has accused Pete A. Tenorio, GOP candidate for Lt. Governor, of spreading "blatant lies" about the financial aid program for

You may fool some people some of the time but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

Ogunoro said the Governor in fact approved the \$532,200 student aid appropriation, but vetoed the Senate plan to divide the money among the islands.

"The program was a mess before it was transferred to the Northern Marianas Community College," Ogunoro said. "Now the program is run professionally. A committee of the Board of Education makes the awards and the staff of the College provides the staff work."

Camacho and Ogunoro were reacting to the statements Pete A. Tenorio made in a story on page one of the Sept. 25th issue of the Examiner.

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