

Chapter 7

REVOLUTION

As the sugar companies became ever more powerful, they became less and less willing to allow the power of the monarchy to remain unchecked. After rising to the throne at the age of 52, Queen Liliuokalani moved quickly to revoke the constitution of 1887 which her brother had signed under duress. She was aware of the potential danger of eliminating this constitution, but underestimated the power of the planters and merchants. She also wished to replace all of her haole ministers with Hawaiians.

Many of the Americans in the islands found this threatening and a dozen of them led by Lorrin Thurston formed the Annexation Club. Many of the members of this club, including Thurston, became the nucleus of the Committee of Safety to be mentioned later. While he was in Washington, Thurston set up a secret meeting with President Harrison. He was given verbal assurances that Harrison favored annexation. The legislature of 1892 was more chaotic than usual. The followers of the Queen wanted a constitutional convention to draft a new constitution that would restore power to the royalty. The followers of Thurston on the other hand were pushing for a constitution that would speed the path to annexation. With all of this infighting, essential matters such as appropriation bills were ignored. Liliuokalani, in a measure that was far ahead of its time, backed a bill to create a national lottery as a revenue source. A less enlightened bill that would have licensed and legalized opium was also proposed. Maintaining hopes of bankrupting the country and thus forcing annexation, the Queen's adversaries opposed all revenue bills. The Queen appointed her seventh cabinet of the year amid a storm of controversy.

A new constitution was then proposed by the Queen. Two of its major features were that only true Hawaiians could vote, and property qualifications for voting would be removed. Liliuokalani was well aware of the potential ramifications of this new constitution. She postponed announcing the new constitution as she feared that it could very well lead to a haole revolution.

News of the constitution was leaked and the haoles made their move. Thurston and his friends were convinced that the Queen would soon ruin the country. A Committee of Safety was formed and they began drafting papers for a provisional government on January 15, 1893. The Queen went to the U.S.

Minister Stevens to see if he would back the monarchy but he had been meeting in secret with the conspirators already and would give her no assurances. Several hundred supporters of the Queen gathered in the Palace Square to voice their support. A crowd of 1,500 gathered to hear what the Committee of Safety had to say. Tensions remained high and the following Monday four boatloads of troops from the US Boston entered Honolulu under orders from Stevens. Sanford Dole head of the Supreme Court, became president of the provisional government. The Committee of Safety then took possession of the government buildings and the new government was recognized by Minister Stevens. Liliuokalani, wishing to avoid bloodshed, resigned and the revolution was complete.

The annexationists, including Thurston, traveled to Washington to ask for territorial status, but the administration had changed and Grover Cleveland, a democrat, was now president. Cleveland put them on hold and sent his own delegate to Hawai'i to research the revolution. John Blount, a former Congressman, was wined and dined by the Big Five. They assumed that he would naturally take their side, but he gathered over 1,000 pages of testimony from a broad cross section of Hawaiians. He urged Cleveland not to sign the annexation treaty and to reject the claims of Thurston and his allies that they represented to people of Hawai'i.

Based on a careful assessment of Blount's report Cleveland made a speech to Congress on December 18, 1893. Here are some excerpts from that speech.

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

"As I apprehend the situation, we are brought face to face with the following conditions:

The lawful Government of Hawai'i was overthrown without the drawing of a sword or the firing of a shot by a process every step of which, it may be safely asserted, is directly traceable to and dependent for its success upon the agency of the United States acting through its diplomatic and naval representatives.

But for the notorious predilections of the United States Minister for annexation, the Committee of Safety, which should be called the Committee of Annexation, would never have existed.

But for the landing of the United States forces upon false pretexts respecting the danger to life and property the committee would never have

exposed themselves to the pains and penalties of treason by undertaking the subversion of the Queen's Government.

But for the presence of the United States forces in the immediate vicinity and in position to afford all needed protection and support the committee would not have proclaimed the provisional government from the steps of the Government building.

And finally, but for the lawless occupation of Honolulu under false pretexts by the United States forces, and but for Minister Stevens' recognition of the provisional government when the United States forces were its sole support and constituted its only military strength, the Queen and her Government would never have yielded to the provisional government, even for a time and for the sole purpose of submitting her case to the enlightened justice of the United States.

Believing, therefore, that the United States could not, under the circumstances disclosed, annex the islands without justly incurring the imputation of acquiring them by unjustifiable methods, I shall not again submit the treaty of annexation to the Senate for its consideration, and in the instructions to Minister Willis, a copy of which accompanies this message, I have directed him to so inform the provisional government.

But in the present instance our duty does not, in my opinion, end with refusing to consummate this questionable transaction. It has been the boast of our government that it seeks to do justice in all things without regard to the strength or weakness of those with whom it deals. I mistake the American people if they favor the odious doctrine that there is no such thing as international morality, that there is one law for a strong nation and another for a weak one, and that even by indirection a strong power may with impunity despoil a weak one of its territory.

By an act of war, committed with the participation of a diplomatic representative of the United States and without authority of Congress, the Government of a feeble but friendly and confiding people has been overthrown. A substantial wrong has thus been done which a due regard for our national character as well as the rights of the injured people requires we should endeavor to repair. The provisional government has not assumed a republican or other constitutions form, but has remained a mere executive council or oligarchy, set up without the assent of the people. It has not sought to find a permanent basis of popular support and has given no evidence of an intention to do so. Indeed, the representatives of that government assert that the people

of Hawai`i are unfit for popular government and frankly avow that they can be best ruled by arbitrary or despotic power.

The law of nations is founded upon reason and justice, and the rules of conduct governing individual relations between citizens or subjects of a civilized state are equally applicable as between enlightened nations.

These principles apply to the present case with irresistible force when the special conditions of the Queen's surrender of her sovereignty are recalled. She surrendered not to the provisional government, but to the United States. She surrendered not absolutely and permanently, but temporarily and conditionally until such time as the facts could be considered by the United States. Furthermore, the provisional government acquiesced in her surrender in that manner and on those terms, not only by tacit consent, but through the positive acts of some members of that government who urged her peaceable submission, not merely to avoid bloodshed, but because she could place implicit reliance upon the justice of the United States, and that the whole subject would be finally considered at Washington.

Actuated by these desires and purposes, and not unmindful of the inherent perplexities of the situation nor of the limitations upon my power, I instructed Minister Willis to advise the Queen and her supporters of my desire to aid in the restoration of the status existing before the lawless landing of the United States forces at Honolulu on the 16th of January last, if such restoration could be effected upon terms providing for clemency as well as justice to all parties concerned.

In commending this subject to the extended powers and wide discretion of the Congress, I desire to add the assurance that I shall be much gratified to cooperate in any legislative plan which may be devised for the solution of the problem before us which is consistent with American honor, integrity, and morality."

GROVER CLEVELAND

Executive Mansion,

Washington, December 18, 1893 1.

The provisional government failed to heed President Cleveland's demands, and since their end run for annexation was foiled, they created the Republic of Hawai`i. Their strategy was to bide their time until Cleveland's term in office ended and they could again apply for annexation when an administration more

favorable to their manipulations took office. They set up a constitutional convention to develop a new constitution for Hawai`i. The requirements for membership in the convention were simple, you must pledge support to the provisional government and resist all efforts to restore the monarchy. With this base of delegates there could be little doubt that the new republic would place the haoles firmly in control. And it came to pass that over two-thirds of the ministers in the new government were descendants of the Congregational missionaries who first landed 70 years earlier.

Native Hawaiians still held strong feelings of loyalty to the monarchy, and a plan was created to carry out a counter revolution in early 1895. This revolt, led by Robert Wilcox, a part Hawaiian educated in Italy, was doomed from the start. A few arms had been stockpiled by loyal Hawaiians and the Queen was even drawing up a new constitution. Rumors of the plot caused the police force of the Republic to search in earnest for the weapons cache. On January 6 shots were exchanged between police and royalist sympathizers. The police prevailed and the short lived oppositions quickly crumbled. The Queen was implicated in the plot and placed under house arrest in Iolani Palace. She was eventually freed, after eight months of confinement, and went to Washington to plead her case.

With the election of the Republican William McKinley as president in 1898, the annexationists felt the tide turning in their favor. The US House and Senate continued their ongoing debate on annexation. The speedy military victories in the Spanish American War created an urge for territorial expansion and this could only have a positive impact on the annexationists. In early July both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed resolutions of annexation and on July 7, 1898, President McKinley signed the resolution. Hawai`i was now a territory of the United States. It has recently come to light that a petition was circulated at the time of annexation and the overwhelming majority of Hawaiians were in favor of the restoration of the monarchy. These Hawaiian royalists created the Home Rule party to run candidates for office under the Territorial framework of government.