

Chapter 8

TERRITORIAL DAYS

With the arrival of territorial status U.S. laws were now the supreme law of the land. While the general American assumption exists that the democratic structure of government allows for a far greater degree of individual freedom than would be found under a monarchy, native Hawaiians did not share this view. The framework of government under territorial status is far different from that put in place when a region becomes a state. The Organic Act passed in June of 1900 established the framework of the Territorial government and broadened voting rights to include all male citizens, whether they were landowners or not. There are three major sources of governmental power in a territory and these will now be examined.

The first pillar of power in territorial government was the governor. This position is far different from the role of governor in a state. In the first place, the governor was not elected by the people but appointed by the President for a four year term. The individual who is selected as a territorial governor has far more power than the governor of a state. The territorial governor controlled all appointments to administrative positions, had absolute veto power over the legislature, could not be impeached, and had the authority to place Hawai`i or any part of Hawai`i under martial law at will. It is interesting to note that even during Democratic administrations in Washington a Republican or conservative Democrat always served as governor until World War II. The interests of the Big Five were always well represented.

The second major player in a territory is the delegate to Congress. This individual represented the territory of Hawai`i in the U.S. Congress. Unable to cast a vote, the delegate served to merely answer questions about the territory and provide interpretation about how a particular piece of legislation might affect Hawai`i. They further acted as a conduit for information to and from Hawai`i, holding meetings to inform islanders about relevant events in Washington, and carrying the concerns of Hawaiians back to Congress.

The delegate to Congress was elected by a majority vote of the citizens of Hawai`i. This was not as democratic as it superficially appeared. Citizens had to demonstrate literacy in the English language in order to be eligible to vote. This tactic, borrowed from the American South, was quite effective in disenfranchising a large number of Hawaiian residents. Furthermore, any candidates who did not

have the blessing of the Big Five were not permitted to campaign on the plantations where a large number of Hawai'i's residents lived. The combination of these two factors assured that anyone with a point of view running counter to big business had a tough fight to be elected in Hawai'i. Despite these obstacles the Home Rule Party's candidate for delegate to Congress, Robert Wilcox, was victorious. His first act as delegate was to introduce a bill that would extend the land policies of the United States to the territory. This included homesteading provisions that the sugar planters found particularly objectionable. None of Wilcox's proposals were taken seriously by Congress and he quickly lost all effectiveness.

The second elected delegate to Congress was Prince Jonah Kuhio. Ironically he was an heir to the throne of Queen Liliuokalani. He was convinced by Henry Baldwin of Alexander and Baldwin fame that by helping the Big Five he was insuring the economic future of the islands and therefore helping the Hawaiian people. With the support of the Big Five he won every election from 1902, when the Home Rule party was swept from office, until his death in 1922. Though Kuhio represented the Republicans who put him in office there remained a tension between them. He typically won close to 90% of the haole vote when running, yet he genuinely cared about the plight of native Hawaiians.

The last source of power in territorial days was the Territorial Legislature. Members were elected by a vote of the people, but as with the vote for delegate to Congress, the franchise issue and plantation campaigning played to the advantage of candidates representing sugar interests. Though some pro-Hawaiian representatives were always elected, the Big Five maintained control of a majority of seats in the legislature. It would be accurate to state that the Republican party ruled the territory much as the businessmen who overthrew the Queen had ruled between 1893 and 1898 during the days of the Republic of Hawai'i. This is all the more amazing when you consider the fact that two-thirds of the voters were native Hawaiians during the early days of the territory. The fruits of political power were not limited to the Big Five. Others with missionary roots in the Islands such as Walter Dillingham made their fortunes on land development and other business ventures.

It has been said that government was controlled from the lounge of the exclusive Pacific Club in Honolulu, where wealthy sugar planters met to plan their strategies for the future of the Islands over snifters of brandy and Cuban cigars. The issue of race was never far beneath the surface. Though many of the planters had married into ali'i society in earlier days and therefore had offspring of mixed

blood, they considered themselves the blue bloods of Hawai'i. In dealings with Washington they never missed the chance to state their position as the most pro U.S. element in the Islands and hence the most stable and dependable. There can be no denying that the United States was a highly racist society at this point in its history, with the white race holding a virtual monopoly on power and status. Southern Senators in particular were fond of using the issue of race against the new territory. The multiethnic nature of the Islands undoubtedly delayed the drive for statehood for many years. Against this backdrop it is easy to see why the planters, who maintained a permanent lobbying office in Washington, were able to wield such a disproportionate amount of power.

Labor disputes came under U.S. law with the passage of annexation in 1898. This gave the workers a certain, though limited, degree of autonomy that had previously been lacking. Five thousand Japanese plantation workers went on strike in 1909. The planters had been adroit at pitting one group of workers against another so early strikes tended to be composed of workers of one nationality. At this time Japanese workers were being paid 25% less than Portuguese who were working their same number of hours per month. Strike breakers were hired at twice the rate of pay of the Japanese strikers. The strikers were evicted from their plantation homes. This early strike was a failure and the strikers eventually returned to work at their previous wages. Another strike by Japanese workers in 1920 ended with much the same result.

The Filipino Federation of Labor, under its fiery leader Pablo Manlapit, went on strike at the same time as the second Japanese strike. They refused to coordinate their strikes and met with similar results. Though wages did not increase working conditions were upgraded. Manlapit led a second strike of 3,000 Filipino workers in 1924. This time the strike was much less peaceful. The Filipinos were armed and attacked the strike breakers. The situation escalated into a full blown riot; sixteen strikers and 4 policemen were killed. Eventually the national guard was called in. The strike had again failed and Manlapit was expelled from the country.

The National Labor Relations Act was passed in 1935 as part of FDR's New Deal. This piece of legislation guaranteed workers the right to organize and to use collective bargaining to better their wages and working conditions. The courts upheld the constitutionality of the NLRA in 1937 which set the stage for its implementation. A strike in 1937 by Filipino workers finally succeeded and strikers received a 15% pay increase. By this time two-thirds of plantation workers were Filipino so the effect of the strike was widespread.

The ILWU-International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union came to power in 1938. They lead a strike against the Matson Lines. The Matson Line was the shipping arm of the Big Five and had a virtual monopoly on all goods coming into and out of Hawai'i. A strike against them had the potential of bringing all trade in the Islands to a stand-still. The stakes were high and tensions quickly erupted. In Hilo on the Big Island, the second largest city in Hawai'i, violence flared between strikers, strike breakers, and the police. Fifty of the strikers were wounded in the ensuing gunfire and the incident was called the "Hilo Massacre". The strike ended as a stalemate and the workers returned to their jobs with no appreciable gains. Despite this setback the ILWU had established itself as a major player in Hawai'i. At around this time the union affiliated with the CIO – Congress of Industrial Organizations. The larger AFL – American Federation of Labor – had also made a bid but due to the fact that the AFL at this point in its history was considered a decidedly pro-white union the CIO won out. Organizing workers in the Islands would have been very difficult if the parent union was perceived as racist.

During World War II, which will be covered in detail in the next chapter, labor disputes were non-existent as any stoppage of production was viewed as aiding the enemy. This situation was even more dramatic in Hawai'i which was under martial law from the attack at Pearl Harbor till the conclusion of the war. Wages were frozen in the Islands by the military commander. However, union members were very proud of the role that they played in helping to win the war.

Shortly after the end of the war in 1945 the ILWU won its bid to organize the plantation workers. They wasted no time in flexing their collective muscle. In September of 1946, plantation workers numbering 2,000 went out on strike. The sugar companies could not withstand this amount of pressure and Castle & Cooke was the first of the Big Five to settle. It was a clear union victory.

Jack Hall, a very colorful figure with distinct leftist leanings, became head of the ILWU in Hawai'i in the mid 40's. He was instrumental in coordinating a second strike against the Matson Line in 1949. Two thousand dock workers walked off the job and nothing was entering or leaving the Islands for six months. The strikers again won and the power of labor was clearly established. In his personal life things did not go so smoothly. Hall was called up in front of the Senate Committee on Internal Security. This committee was the Senate version of McCarthy's "red hunting" House Committee on Un American Activities. As with many of his contemporaries he pleaded the 5th Amendment. At the time this was seen as an admission of guilt and he was arrested and tried on charges under the

Smith Act. This act dealt with charges of teaching the overthrow of the United States government using force and violence. Though he was eventually cleared and never abandoned by loyal union members, it created a blot on his reputation that he never fully overcame. It should be admitted that many labor leaders in Hawai'i flirted with communism during the 30's and 40's. They were pushing for increased rights for workers and minority members, however, and were in no way involved in plots to overthrow the government of the United States or to ally themselves with the government of the USSR.

Hall's power within the union remained unchallenged and in 1958 he led another strike of sugar workers. The union again won concessions from the planters, setting the stage for a period of relative cooperation between unions and management, since the planters were forced to recognize that they no longer maintained sole control. It would also be fair to speculate that the better standards of working conditions and wages that the plantation workers won in the second half the 20th century played a role in the massive closure of sugar and pineapple operations that has been taking place during the 1990's. As of 1998 there was a single active sugar mill on the island of Hawai'i. Dole abandoned Lana'i for cheaper production costs in South East Asia. The remaining sugar and pineapple operations mainly cater to tourists who have an interest in observing the former mainstay of the Hawaiian economy.