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20世紀中庸の人種、エスニシティ、階級、そして社
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Okinawan Labor and Political Activists in Hawai‘i: Race, Ethnicity, Class and Social Movements in the Mid-20th Century

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ハワイの沖縄系労働運動・政治活動家たち： 20世紀中庸の人種、エスニシティ、階級、そして社会運動

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21世紀を生きるハワイの住民は概して他のアメリカ国民よりも優れた市民権と労働権を享受している。これらの権利がどのように獲得されたかということについて、社会的には二つの説明の仕方が定着している。一つは多民族的労働組合主義を基盤とした組織化に成功した労働運動によるものとしての説明である。二つ目は、以前の民主党支持者、労働組合、そして特に第二次世界大戦に従軍し多大な犠牲を払った日系退役軍人たちが共闘しながら社会で政策決定過程における平等を要求し、半世紀にもわたる共和党支配をひっくり返した「民主党革命」によるものとしての説明である。いずれにおいても、沖縄人と沖縄アイデンティティは一般的日本人の括りの中に埋没し、評価されることはなかった。また、一方では、一般的沖縄人は、経済的、社会的成功を勝ち取るべく起業家精神にあふれ、民族的連携を図り、ハワイ農業で苦役に従事する一世として説明される。公文資料と口述史料を基に、本稿では沖縄人が起業家としてではなく社会の活動家として果たした役割を強調したい。特に人口統計学的要素や社会史的要素がどのように活動家としての役割を後押ししたのかを明らかにする。結論として、言祝がれ流布するハワイにおける沖縄人の「立身出世話」とハワイ社会における沖縄人共同体の将来の方向性について再検討を促す。

Student: “Uchinanchu — they’re kanemochi (wealthy).”

Professor: “Really?”

Student: “OK, maybe not all — but lots.”

— a conversation with a gosei University of Hawai‘i Ethnic Studies student in Fall 2008

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Introduction

Uchinanchu (Okinawans) in Hawai‘i are often perceived to be affluent and successful. Indeed, the perception of their “model minority” status is not only widely held by non-Okinawans, but also uncritically accepted by local Okinawans. At a time when social resources are shrinking, when immigrants and disadvantaged ethnic minorities in multi-ethnic Hawai‘i are competing for access to educational opportunities and jobs, and when indigenous Hawaiians are struggling to regain their lands and sovereign rights, the belief that Okinawan success is based on their cultural “exceptionalism” is inappropriate, if not outright offensive. How did Okinawans in Hawai‘i transform from being a discriminated and ridiculed group (e.g., by the use of a common epithetical saying: “*Okinawa-ken-ken, buta kaukau*” — “people from Okinawa, pig food”), to being perceived as wealthy — as “*kanemochi*?”

Hawai‘i residents, including Okinawans, generally do enjoy an extensive array of civil rights and, because of progressive labor laws, better working conditions compared with residents of other states in the USA. How did this occur? Motivation, hard work, and collective institutions such as traditional *moai* or *tanomoshi* (Okinawan revolving credit associations) are often given explanations of Okinawans’ success. Social scientists however, realize these kinds of practices only can have limited effects. That is, they may facilitate upward *individual mobility* but only mobility which occurs on the *micro-* or small scale level. To raise the status of a whole group, i.e., *social mobility*, requires larger-scale collective actions or *social agency*. Furthermore, to understand how these large-scale changes in social status occur, we need to look at *macro-level* changes, including demographic shifts and socio-historical contexts. Connecting the *micro-* and *macro-levels*, at the *meso-level*, we need to examine collective actions taken within formal organizations which address the dominant social *structure* (Giddens, 1984). In short, critically examining the myth of Okinawan exceptionalism requires focusing on labor and political movements and the organizations which transformed the landscape, history and social structure of Hawai‘i in the mid-twentieth century. It also requires examining where and how Okinawans were located in those social movements, and their contributions therein.

In this paper, I tie the social mobility experienced by Okinawans in Hawai‘i to larger social forces such as demographic patterns and the labor and political movements which were sweeping across the United States and fomenting in Hawai‘i in the mid-twentieth century. I contend that it was the labor movement, and Okinawans’ participation in it, which accounted for the rise in the standard of living of Okinawans and the population at large. Complementing this was the rise of the Democratic Party in 1954, another (and related) arena where Okinawans’ participation was significant. Together, these two social movements laid the foundation for significant reforms which lifted the living standards of the general population in Hawai‘i and consequently also that of Okinawans as a group. Furthermore, I maintain that Okinawans were both serendipitous and purposeful actors in

these movements. By examining demographic composition, the political and economic history of this period, I believe important lessons can be learned about personal and social responsibility, about agency and structure, about public policy and civil society.

This paper relies on a linked analysis of various archival materials. These include items from oral history interviews conducted by the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Center for Oral History (COH) and the University of Hawai‘i-West-O‘ahu Center for Labor Education and Research’s (CLEAR) *Rice and Roses* (labor history series). It also uses newspaper accounts and other archival documents found in both the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 142 (ILWU Archives) and the ILWU International Archives in San Francisco, the San Francisco State University Labor Archives (SFSU Archives), and the Okinawa Prefectural Archives (OPA).¹⁾ In examining these materials, I pay attention to what the historical sources have to say about Okinawan individuals in the particular context of Hawai‘i. I attempt to correlate these different available data on Okinawan individuals, their thoughts as expressed in the interviews, with the historical events going on in both Hawai‘i and American society at the time, and sometimes in Okinawa. This investigation reveals some of the ways in which Okinawan activists negotiated their ethnic and progressive identities while engaging in socially significant work.

1. The Myth of the Model Minority

The term “model minority” is often used to refer to ethnic minorities who have achieved a higher socio-economic status in a multi-ethnic society. The designation is often double-edged, both applauding the accomplishments of the minority group, while retaining the group’s minority or subordinate status vis-à-vis the “majority” group. It maintains that in spite of the group’s status as minority, it has been able to attain its higher status without the benefit of social “assistance” or “hand-outs.” Consequently, it reinforces the idea that there are “good minorities” and “problematic minorities” who don’t play by society’s rules. This conception divides minority groups and has traditionally benefited the dominant group (Wilson, 1973). In short, embracing of the “model minority” status and logic reinforces the *status quo* of inequality and injustice.

In this section of the paper, I briefly sketch out the socio-historical context in Hawai‘i into which the Okinawan issei arrived. I describe how they were paradoxically not only targets of racism, but also beneficiaries of it. I then discuss the political, economic, and historical contexts into which the Okinawan nisei in Hawai‘i came of age and how they were socially positioned to participate in the events of the mid-20th century. In other words, I attempt to show how Okinawans both aided and then benefited from the reforms instituted by progressive social movements in the mid-twentieth century. All these were possible because they were serendipitously in the right place at the right time. They were, as the title of Jon Shirota’s novel describes, *Lucky Come Hawaii* (1965).

2. Background on Modern Hawaii and the United States in the 19th and early 20th Centuries

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Hawaiian archipelago underwent rapid and radical social changes. Starting in the late eighteenth century, the Hawaiian Islands were visited by explorers, traders and missionaries representing various nations. Through wars and consolidations, the islands were rapidly transformed from a set of autonomous mini-kingdoms into a single kingdom headed by Kamehameha I. However, the indigenous Hawaiian population imploded, decimated by the introduction of infectious diseases and disruptions of their established social and cultural patterns. Over the next few decades, the indigenous people and the Hawaiian Kingdom grappled with the accelerating encroachment of commercial interests.

A Reciprocity Treaty of 1876 between the United States and the Kingdom of Hawai‘i crystallized the expansion and domination of a sugar industrial economy, and greater American influence in Hawai‘i’s affairs. King Kalākaua was forced to sign a new constitution (often called the “Bayonet Constitution”) in 1886; it granted greater powers to commercial interests while limiting the powers of the Hawaiian people. In her attempt to reverse those conditions, Queen Liliu‘okalani was overthrown in 1893, in a coup led by business interests linked to the United States of America. Failing immediate incorporation by the U.S. because of the election of President Grover Cleveland, whose administration which was less sympathetic to expansionism, the islands languished as a Republic for a time. Hawai‘i was finally annexed by the U.S. in 1898 under President William McKinley via a Newlands Resolution (rather than a treaty, which is the customary procedure) because there were not enough votes for ratification. Hawai‘i became a Territory in 1900 and remained in that political status until 1959 when it became the fiftieth state of the United States of America. Statehood status is still viewed as illegitimate by certain segments of the Hawaiian community.

This history serves as an important backdrop when examining the status of Okinawans in Hawai‘i. So were the events and broad historical patterns and changes unfolding on the continental U.S. In addition to its expansionist moves in Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean, America was dealing with the transformation of its workforce. The numbers of European and Asian immigrant workers kept increasing just as the descendants of earlier Euro-Americans were organizing into trade unions to improve their wages and working conditions. Threatened by “coolie labor” (cheap, super-exploitable labor) undercutting their efforts, Euro-American nativistic unionists such as Dennis Kearney organized the Workingman’s Party. This political party, most influential in California, lobbied for legislation barring Chinese immigrant labor from California and other western states, and eventually nationally. Their efforts culminated in the passage of the first immigration law targeting a specific national group: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, renewed in 1892, and finally made permanent in 1902. As low-wage Japanese immigrant labor filled

the vacuum created by the lack of Chinese laborers, anti-Japanese sentiment also emerged.

On the U.S. continent, the resentment of cheap coolie labor continued to grow, for Asian labor often worked for wages which undercut white workers. Calls by the white working-class to exclude the “yellow peril” from the U.S. intensified. Simultaneously, the U.S. expansion into Asia, the Pacific, and the Caribbean was bringing together a series of events which had positive consequences for Uchinanchu immigrants. After the exclusion of Chinese workers, Japanese sojourning laborers increasingly became the target for racial exclusion; the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 was the result. Since Japan’s central government was somewhat stronger than China’s in this period, the provisions were less unequal. The Gentlemen’s Agreement provided that Japan would limit the numbers of male laborers it sent to the U.S., and in exchange, the U.S. would permit Japanese already in the U.S. to reunite with their families. Eventually, this would lead to the Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Asian Exclusion Act, which set restrictive quotas for immigrants from different nations — ultimately reducing the numbers of Asian immigrants to virtually zero.

These two laws had important implications for Okinawans. First, Okinawan issei were incorporated into Hawaii’s political economy at a particular historical moment and into a particular socio-political context. On April 30, 1900, a scant three months after the twenty-six men from Okinawa arrived on the island of O‘ahu, the Organic Act was passed, preparing the way for Hawai‘i to officially become a Territory of the United States on June 14, 1900. With this, the previously signed labor contracts were nullified; the Okinawan men were free to leave. More important, those Okinawans who chose to stay in Hawai‘i, entered into a labor environment where their pay and working conditions, while not great, were substantially better than those experienced by the Naichi (mainland) Japanese and Chinese laborers who had come much earlier. Okinawans were free from the most egregious provisions of the Masters and Servants Act of 1850, including those which had permitted bounties (monetary rewards) for the capture of workers who had run away from plantations, and extended labor time for contracts violations, etc. (Beechert, 1985; Hiura and Terada, 1981). Therefore, Okinawans experienced labor conditions which, according to some social movement theories, were more favorable for organizing. They experienced — *relative deprivation* (rather than *absolute deprivation*).

Second, by the time of the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907, the dream of many Japanese laborers of returning to the homeland as wealthy men had evaporated; settling in the U.S. and Hawaii was becoming more realistic. Japanese were shifting from a *sojourner* mentality to a *settler* one, as they realized that their paltry earnings were inadequate for returning to Japan (Takaki, 1983). As they gave up their dreams of returning to their homeland, and instead adjusted to settling and raising families in Hawaii, they sent for their wives and children. Those who were not already married, petitioned their families to locate wives for them in an arranged marriage practice which came to be known as “Picture Brides” (Chai and Kawakami, 1986). Some of the more adventurous “Picture Brides”

even negotiated their own marriages. The demographic patterns which resulted from the Gentlemen's Agreement had profound social implications for the fortunes of the Japanese in Hawai'i in general, and Okinawans in particular.

Demographers focus on birth, death and migration because the interactions of these factors affect population size, characteristics, and resource availability. Between 1907 and the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, the numbers of women coming to Hawai'i from Okinawa skyrocketed. Japanese (and Okinawan) migration which has been masculinely gendered up to that point, flipped and became more balanced and, in some years, even female-dominated (Nordyke, 1989, p. 66). Nearly 10,000 Picture Brides entered in this interval, many of whom were Okinawans. In 1918, for example, women made up 38% of the Okinawans in Hawai'i (Ishikawa, 1981, p. 90).

The more evenly balanced sex ratio among the Japanese and Okinawans had two consequences. One consequence was the creation of families and veritable a "baby boom." Japanese males were more likely than other males of other ethnic groups to be married, consequently, the population of Japanese (and Okinawans) increased substantially (Nordyke, 1989). In one area, Puna, where a large population of Okinawans resided, "older residents recalled life in a big family in a small plantation house that consisted of parents and many siblings (sometimes including grandparents or in-laws)" (Kinoshita, 2002, p. 10). It was common for families to have eight to twelve children, with older children helping to raise younger siblings and/or terminating their formal schooling to earn income to aid their parents support their families.

The second result of the more balanced sex ratio was the possibility of second incomes. As Tomonori Ishikawa (1981) has shown, the level of remittances, funds sent back to Okinawa, substantially increased after women arrived. This is hardly surprising. "Bachelor societies" tend to promote hyper-masculinized activities such as drinking, gambling and prostitution which are counter productive to capital accumulation. The introduction of wives, at minimum, reduced participation in those activities, and provided the possibility of a second income for the household. Accounts of "Picture Brides" tell of daily work routines which began hours before sunrise and continued late into the night (Chai and Kawakami, 1986). Many of these women worked in the fields, usually at 60% of wages their husbands earned. In the days before automation, they often worked alongside their husbands gathering and bundling the harvested cane stalks for their husbands to do *happai*ko (carry the 50–60 pound bundles on their shoulders, climb up a narrow plank, and unload the cane into the mule-drawn carts or trains for transport to the mill); or in *kachiken* (cutting cane into foot-long segments to be water-flumed to the mill), or *hole-hole* (stripping dry cane leaves from the stalk), or *hoehana* (weeding with a hoe). After completing their paid work, they returned to their "second shift" (Hochschild and Mac-hung, 1997), the unpaid household work of cooking, cleaning and raising children. Often, they would supplement their meager wages and/or those of their husbands with informal economic sector activities such as cooking, or doing laundry for the bachelor workers, including Filipino workers, to earn extra cash. Other entrepreneurial work such as making

tofu (bean curd), or *sake* (rice wine), tending the *furo*, relying on unpaid family labor, and other activities generated even more cash (Chinen, 1990). Consequently, the remittances from Okinawans in Hawai‘i surpassed those of other diasporic Okinawan communities (Ishikawa, 1981).

Several significant social structural factors affected Okinawans’ family and community formation. The first of these was their social location in the society at large, and in the social hierarchy of the plantation economy in particular. As one of the later groups incorporated into the paternalistically managed plantation workforce, indeed entering at a time when many Naichi were leaving the plantation, Okinawans were given the worst and lowest paying jobs. They were assigned the least desirable housing, often on the periphery, away from the center of the plantation’s activities. Second, they faced double discrimination in Hawai‘i. As Asian workers, they faced racism and the institutional discrimination imposed by the *haole* (white) plantation system. Additionally, having arrived at least some fifteen years after the *Kanyaku Imin* (government sponsored immigration), Okinawans were also a minority within the minority Japanese population — a “double minority.” Incorporated as a prefecture in 1879, only six years before the government-sponsored immigration from Japan would begin, Okinawans lacked an established infrastructure for formal education. With limited access to schools, Okinawans’ verbal and written Japanese language proficiency was lower than those of the *Naicha* (Japanese people living on mainland Japan). Moreover, isolated from people on the mainland of Japan, it was not until they were in Hawai‘i, that the Uchinanchu and Yamatunchu first encountered each other *en masse* — as prefectural groups with noticeably different languages, customs, taste, dress, habits and mores. Prejudice and discrimination were frequently the result (Ikeda and Toyama, 1981; Shiota, 1990; Ige, 1981); there are many accounts of discrimination and psychic injury. Epithets like “hey, Okinawa!” or “*Okinawa-ken ken, buta kaukau!* (people from Okinawa, pig food) were often leveled against Okinawans, because of their pig-raising practices which included gathering garbage and preparing it for pig feed. Even other ethnic groups noticed that Okinawans were “not-quite-Japanese,” referring to them as “Japanee-Pake” (Japanese-Chinese).

Okinawans’ responses to this socially structured “double discrimination” took several forms. Some Okinawans, especially the *nisei*, coped as individuals by adopting various impression management techniques, presenting a more American or Japanese “self.” This included speaking better Japanese, dressing in Japanese or Western styles, forgoing Okinawan food or cultural habits. Others, especially the *issei*, coped collectively, by forming locality clubs or *kumiai*, by in-marrying, and by participating in revolving credit associations called *moai* or *tanomoshi*. Finally, Okinawans also tended to gravitate to geographical areas where other Okinawans tended to reside, creating small communities of familiar folk (Ishikawa, 1981). Both strategies — individuals “passing” as well as congregating in Okinawan communities — probably were used, depending on the particulars of the situation.

3. Okinawans and the Labor Movement

The labor movement in Hawai‘i is multifaceted, but the union best known for its influence in twentieth century Hawai‘i is the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 142 (ILWU). Coming out of the “industrial organizing” framework of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the ILWU organized workers along the waterfront, in the sugar, pineapple, tuna packing, auto industries, just to name a few. Their ability to organize workers in multi-ethnic Hawai‘i was a major feat since the “divide-and-conquer” strategies used by management, especially on the plantations, had been effective for nearly a century. Techniques such as ethnic-related differential pay levels, access to promotions, health services, housing and other benefits had kept workers fighting amongst themselves, deterring effective labor organizing. Consequently, the CIO-led ILWU took a multi-ethnic approach. Rallying around the slogan “An Injury to One is an Injury to All,” it ensured representation of the major ethnic groups, printed key documents in various languages, and was successful in organizing workers. In contrast to the craft-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL) approach, the CIO-led ILWU organized whole workplaces, whole industries. This narrative of multi-racial unionization, however, blurs the role ethnicity might have played in the lives of key individuals who pushed this collective enterprise on. Particularly in the 1940s and ‘50s, those individuals included several Okinawans. In this section, we will explore the roles played by some of these Okinawan activists.

Even before the arrival of Okinawans, sugar plantation workers already had established a history of resistance to the oppressive working conditions they faced (Beechert, 1985). These worker actions often were referred to as “riots,” or “walk-outs, and were fairly spontaneous responses to specific incidents or conditions. They were usually localized to a particular plantation or short-term strikes lasting about a week or so, but they functioned as learning opportunities for future actions. The large-scale labor organizing that took place in the mid-20th century came about because of the confluence of several factors. Locally, these included changes in the plantation labor force, the rationalization of sugar production, the increasing migration of Asian workers off the plantations and into the urban areas; the backdrop of unionization on the continental U.S. also played a part, for the external support that the national labor organizations provided external support (Beechert, 1985, p. 179).

When Hawai‘i was incorporated into the U.S. in 1900, skilled trade workers from the continental U.S. were attracted to the island territory. Along with their trade they brought craft unionism, and several skilled trade unions were established in the islands. Organizers associated with the American Federation of Labor began to move into Hawai‘i. The unionized higher wages attracted some of skilled workers off the plantations and into the urban areas which changed the composition of the plantations’ workforce. Japanese workers who were formerly not able to get skill trades jobs a decade earlier, began mov-

ing into these higher-paying positions on the plantations, and eventually joined the workers of other ethnic backgrounds who previously had moved off the plantations and into urban areas.

In 1909, the Higher Wage Association organized a strike of mainly Japanese sugar workers from Waipahu, Aiea, and other plantations on O‘ahu. That strike was ultimately broken by the introduction of “scab” workers (i.e., replacement workers hired to break a strike). What is important is that the strike lasted from May 9 to August 5 — nearly three months — because it had the support of sugar workers on the neighbor islands. Moreover, four months after the strike ended, the planters raise the wages and made many of the improvements demanded by the strikers. The Higher Wage Association was led by Fred Makino, Yasutaro Soga and Tomoyuki Negoro, Japanese community leaders and intellectuals who were largely based in urban Honolulu; they served an important organizing function. Makino was publisher of the *Hawaii Hochi*, while Soga was publisher of the *Nippu Jiji* (which, after the Second World War, became the *Hawaii Times*). What roles Okinawans played in this strike needs to be further researched, but two items are noteworthy here. The first item is that Ishikawa (1981) had identified Waipahu, ‘Ewa and Aiea as areas where large numbers of Okinawans resided. Second, Waipahu workers were especially noted for their militancy, and Seiyei Wakukawa (1981, p. 235) notes that Okinawans were active in this strike, and even were leaders in the subsequent 1920 strike.

In the interval between the 1909 Japanese strike and the 1920 Japanese and Filipino strike, the islands continued to be visited by organizers associated with various trade unions, e.g., even the International Workers of the World (“Wobblies”) organizer Joe Hill. Moreover, through newspapers, workers were being exposed to labor actions in other industrial sectors, notably among harbor and dock workers. As Japanese (and Okinawan) families grew, the demands of sugar workers also changed to include women’s concerns. In the 1920 Japanese and Filipino Strike which lasted nearly six months, the coalition between the two ethnic-based unions initially included demands for maternity leave and other concerns of women. Since the Filipino labor force was mostly single males, this demand came mainly from the Japanese union and, not surprising, many the strikers were Japanese women. After this strike, many Japanese, including Okinawans, began leaving the plantations for urban areas.

Sensing future trends, the plantation elites used various strategies to retain the next generation of plantation workers. The Americanization Movement was designed to encourage Japanese and Okinawan youth to speak English, to adhere to American values, and to remain on the plantations (Tamura, 1994). It divided the Japanese community, with some community leaders like Reverend Takie Okumura actively supporting it, and others like *Hawaii Hochi* publisher Fred Makino rejecting it. Probably the most notorious case embodying the contradictions inherent in the Americanization Movement was the disposition of the Miles Fukunaga case. In 1928, a bright young mentally ill nisei male, frustrated by unattainable college aspirations, kidnapped and then killed the young son of a trust company officer. After an island-wide manhunt, Fukunaga was captured, arrested,

confessed, tried, convicted and executed — despite questions about whether an insanity defense should be explored. Scholar Iha Fuyu visited Hawai‘i around this time and it is thought that his subsequent work was informed by this furor caused by the case (Oshiro, 2007).

According to Seiyei Wakukawa (1981), there was considerable discussion going on about labor and social justice in the various Japanese language newspapers in the 1920s. One of the publications Wakukawa (1981) points to as a decidedly left-leaning newspaper, was the *Yoен Jiho* (Hawaii Star) which was published on Kauai; in its early days, it served mainly an Okinawan readership. Methodist minister, Reverend Seikan Higa took over the paper from 1923–1924 and it took on a pro-labor editorial stance, according to Wakukawa (1981), especially interesting since this is about the time of the 1924 Filipino strike in Hanapepe, Kaua‘i. Chinyei Kinjo, subsequently took it over for a while, but publication was suspended during the war when Japanese language newspapers and other community institutions were shut down. Kinjo was arrested, detained and subsequently sent to internment camp during World War II. Helen Geracimos Chapin, in her study of newspapers in Hawai‘i has this to say about the paper:

“*Yoен Jiho* [Hawaii star] (1921–1941), also called the *Koloa Times*, was sponsored by the Kauai Labor Union and was the most radical of the ethnic language papers in that it was Marxist in orientation. Editor Ichro Izuka was joined by future labor leaders Jack Kimoto and Ginjaro Arashiro. With a hefty circulation of 1,000, *Yoен Jiho* gained inclusion in the list of “dangerous periodicals compiled by a territorial commission on “subversive activities” (Sakamaki 1928).” (Chapin, 1996, p. 136)

By the 1930s and ‘40s, Okinawan nisei, who straddled three cultures (Okinawan, Japanese, and American) were coming of age — but they were entering a society fraught with contradictions. The Great Depression had pummeled both the nation’s and Hawai‘i’s economies, causing bankruptcies and widespread unemployment. Labor agitation increased. The Roosevelt Administration’s New Deal economic recovery program included the National Labor Relations Act in 1935 (NLRA, also known as the Wagner Act); it gave manufacturing workers the legal right to organize into unions and to collectively bargain with their employers. Both the American Federation of Labor (AFL), whose unions organized along *craft* lines, and the unions affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which organized workers along *industrial* lines, sent organizers to Hawai‘i. But the CIO organizers were far more effective organizing Hawai‘i’s industrial labor force. Their ideological position of multiracial organizing resonated better with the sugar and pineapple workers whose experiences had been characterized by one ethnic group being pit against another under management’s divide and conquer strategy.

The CIO’s starting point in Hawai‘i was organizing workers in the shipping, stevedoring and longshore industrial areas; eventually, however, their organizing spread to restaurant and laundry workers, and especially the workers employed in the sugar mills and canneries. One Okinawan who was involved in the labor movement from the start was

Matsuki “Mutt” Arashiro who was involved in organizing the Port Allen Waterfront Workers’ Association. Associated with him in organizing plantation workers on Kauai was another Okinawan, Unsei Uchima. They worked with Jack Hall (who later became regional head of the ILWU) and Jack Kimoto in labor organizing efforts. Arashiro, was a gifted strategist. As early as 1939, he attempted to persuade dockworkers that securing a law permitting agricultural workers to organize would ultimately help secure longshore workers’ interests, as well (Beechert, 1985, p. 277).

The problem with the NRLA was that it only applied to industrial workers. Agricultural workers were excluded, even though they were the majority of the workers in both the sugar and pineapple industries. Thus, most of the organizers for the ILWU who organized the two industries with the largest workforces came from jobs in the mill or other industrial positions. Thomas Yagi, an organizer and later Maui Division Director of the ILWU Local 142, became involved with the union when he transferred from Waihee Farm to Wailuku Sugar Warehouse. He had recently graduated from St. Anthony’s School for Boys in 1939. By simply moving from field work into the warehouse, from the status of an agricultural worker to an industrial worker, Yagi became eligible to join the union and participate in its activities under the NLRA. He was encouraged to join the union by “a fellow worker by the name of James Gushiken. And Jimmy was — I was working under him, too, and he’s always nice to me about working” (Yagi interview, 1989, p. 475). At this point, Okinawan identity probably only played a part in enhancing his “social capital,” providing Yagi with some beneficial social networks (since Gushiken is an Okinawan surname), but it did not appear to play a central part in his activism. Probably that was because the union de-emphasized ethnicity, and promoted the message of inclusiveness.

“In the twenties, the difference is this, that in 1946, we had all of the workers together, all ethnic groups, all racial groups — the Filipinos, the Japanese, Portuguese, Hawaiians. All of them together. In the 19 — in the early twenties, they had only the problem of Japanese, they struck, themselves. The Filipinos, they struck, themselves. And these are the kind of problems, 1936, the Filipinos had. They didn’t have the support of the Japanese people, the workers, nor the Portugese workers to support their strike because they were not in it together with them, although they would benefit by it. But that’s the kind of problem they faced. So this strike, 1946 strike, was a first that we struck the plantations in that fashion.” (Yagi interview, 1989, p. 483)

Just as the labor movement was gaining traction, Pearl Harbor Naval Base was attacked by Japan, transforming people of Japanese ancestry into “the enemy.” In Hawai‘i, martial law was declared immediately. There were curfews, black-outs, rationing. Many of the Japanese and Okinawan community leaders — Buddhist ministers, Japanese language school principals and teachers, journalists and publishers — were immediately arrested, detained and/or imprisoned. “Things Japanese” (flags, memorabilia, etc.) were destroyed or repressed. Japanese language newspapers and Japanese language schools were all shut down by military order. Wages were frozen, and restric-

tions were imposed on job changes, travel, and labor organizing. Meanwhile, defense workers and active duty military personnel flooded into Hawai'i — inflating prices, causing crowding, shortages — and unequal wages.

As attention shifted to the war effort, labor organizing took on different forms. These included organizing patriotic support of recreational activities for the armed forces at USOs, blood drives, preparation of medical supplies for the troops, etc. “Organizing” is based on gaining access and developing relationships with people. One of ILWU’s most effective organizers, Yasuki “Yasu” Arakaki of Oloa was involved in the Surfrider Athletic Club, a team initially composed of “rejects” of the Japanese baseball league. While the all-Japanese baseball league was closed down by order of the military governor, the Surfriders were permitted to continue for morale purposes because they were multi-ethnic. In the process of playing baseball on a team with a non-Japanese name, Arakaki was permitted to travel around the island, meet others at baseball games, and to establish contacts with potential union members (Arakaki interview, 1991, pp. 117–119).

Martial law lasted nearly two and a half years. When it was removed, labor organizing took off. The fiery Yasu Arakaki became a major organizer and leader in the labor movement on Hawai'i island, and in the ILWU. As one of the top students in his high school class, he had aspirations to attend Waseda University in Japan, but like Tom Yagi, Arakaki was only able to attain a high school education. With some ten siblings, most of them younger than he, Arakaki was forced into the workforce immediately after graduating from high school. Luckily, he was able to begin in the carpenter’s shop of the plantation where he maintained the flumes, but eventually passed the examination to work in the warehouse in charge of purchasing; this meant he became an industrial worker, eligible to join a union under NLRB rules.

4. California Labor School and International Labor Education Program

Transforming interested workers and potential activists into organized, focused, and competent unionists required exposing these budding leaders to an analysis of the capitalist economic system, the philosophical ideas of organized labor, and the practical or technical aspects of unionism. To accomplish this, the ILWU leadership, together with other supportive Leftist instructors, put together an institution which, in the span of three to five months, provided an intensive training and learning experience for CIO-oriented unionists from around the country. This was the California Labor School (CLS). Participants went to lectures on economic and political theories, learned public speaking skills, visited sites where strikes and picketing were taking place, observed soup kitchens, the process of negotiating contracts, and the costing out of contract proposals. They also came into contact with African Americans and white working-class unionists. Historians continue to debate how closely the CLS was linked to the Communist Party of America (CPA) since many if not most of the instructors were members of the CPA. However, the CLS also operated as a free-standing educational institution and, for a brief time, veterans could use



[Figure 1. Participants in the ILWU and California Labor School leadership training program for Hawaii unionists with ILWU President Harry Bridges, San Francisco, February-April 1946. Source: ILWU Local 142 Archives.]

their Veterans Administration educational benefits to attend it (Holmes, 1994, p. 185).

Since the CIO's philosophy and organizing position was that of racial and ethnic inclusivity, the students who were selected to attend the California Labor School came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and included Japanese, Filipinos, Hawaiians and other ethnic groups in the industrial workforces. Several rank and file unionists from Hawai'i were sent to San Francisco for this labor education in 1946 and 1947. Among the "Japanese" unionists attending in 1946 class were Yasuki Arakaki and Thomas Yagi of Maui, seated second and third from left respectively in the photo below.

Both Yagi and Arakaki regarded their education at the California Labor School as transformative. Both spoke of the experience as the "college education" that they could not afford. Yagi noted that:

"Well, back in 1946, when we had the first [ILWU] conference in Hilo, I together with [ten or eleven] others were selected to attend this special training school in California, known as the California Labor School. And also the training with the officers, and training me how to conduct the various union meetings, parliamentary procedures, news bulletins, and seeing first hand of the international executive board meeting at that time, and meeting with the international officers, discussing union problems. . . . firsthand information on seeing how grievances are processed, how the international officers negotiate contracts. All this has been the topics that which we — strike strategy, political action, economics. . . ." (Interview with Thomas Yagi, 1989, p. 473).

A similar view of the curriculum offered at the California Labor School was provided by

Yasu Arakaki. The curriculum provided him with skills, but also with a chance to contribute something that was long lasting and useful to the union--a strike manual.

“Because I had California Labor School experience, while I was there, we had to attend night classes listening to progressive speakers. We were asked to visit the strike situation, look at the soup kitchen. So when I came home, I wrote, I drafted the strike strategy manual for the sugar workers in Hawaii. The manual is still there. There is some amendments, some corrections there, some improvement, but the strike manual that I prepared is still in the ILWU file.” (Interview with Yasuki Arakaki, 1991, p. 1126).

It also provided Arakaki with some intellectual grounding for him to think deeply and broadly about different kinds of social structures and the kinds of issues which might be generated by them.

“In 1946 I was sent to California Labor School. We were taught American labor history, different ‘isms’, different types of unions. When I say ‘isms,” it means socialism, communism, capitalism, imperialism. So we got a background of different type of ‘isms” that existed in the society at the time.” (Interview with Yasuki Arakaki, 1991, p. 1126)

How did these rural working-class men, both with only high school degrees, manage to travel from Hawai‘i to San Francisco to attend the California Labor School? The solution was quite ingenious, and reveals the degree to which the CIO-affiliated unions cooperated with one another. According to correspondence in ILWU archives, the men were transformed from sugar workers or dock workers into ship’s kitchen workers. In a cooperative arrangement with another CIO-affiliated union, the Cooks and Marine Stewards Union, the ILWU was able to gain “temporary membership” for the students attending the California Labor School and permit these men to work off their transoceanic passage. Arakaki confirms this.

“The first thing they did was to send me to California Labor School. One of the eleven selected in the Territory. Two from the Big Island. I was one of them. We left on the S. S. Matsonia. I worked as a scullion. We peel potato on a ship. After five days, I was in San Francisco in February 28.” (Interview with Yasuki Arakaki, 1991, p. 1129).

In San Francisco, Arakaki developed a friendship with Harry Bridges, the President of the ILWU, and along with a hand-full of other ILWU delegates, even attended the Chicago Peace Conference in 1951, where Bridges was a speaker. The conference brought together Leftist intellectuals, scientists, and artists such as W.E.B. DuBois, Linus Pauling, Dashiell Hammett, Paul Robeson, and others and set out a platform protesting American involvement in the Korean War and the escalation of the nuclear arms race — “Ban the Bomb.” One can only imagine the heady experience it must have been for a warehouse inventory worker from a small plantation town on the Big Island.

The next few years were busy ones for these unionists, the ILWU, as well as other unions. The ILWU aggressively implemented organizing drives and collective bargaining, and their growing strength could be seen in a series of strikes beginning in September

of 1946. The “Great Hawaiian Sugar Strike of 1946,” which lasted 79 days, dealt a blow to the paternalistic forms of control which had previously dominated the plantations. Although it was not successful, the Pineapple Strike of 1947 demonstrated that over 18,000 workers would indeed walk out. Finally, the “Great Hawaiian Dock Strike of 1949,” nearly brought Hawai‘i’s economy to its knees. But just as labor was flexing their muscle, events on the international stage — the Cold War — intervened. The perceived threat of encroaching communism in the U.S., known as the “Red Scare,” shook up American society once again. Its effects were also felt in Hawai‘i, and will be discussed further in the next section.

While it gained power and influence, the ILWU also worked to establish itself as a respectable institution and major player in Hawai‘i’s economy and society. The ILWU developed service programs within the union, setting up a social welfare department and eventually hired Ah Quon Leong McElrath, wife of union official Robert McElrath, to work with the union members’ families on budgeting, family planning, retirement planning, etc. It also set up an education department, hiring David Thompson, to help the rank-and-file unionists understand contemporary issues, institutionalize the education of union officials, etc. One of the programs the union established was an International Labor Education Program in which three-member teams of rank-and-file unionists, competitively selected, were sent abroad to observe the labor and industrial conditions, and other relevant issues in countries around the world. In providing an opportunity to engage rank and file workers in international affairs, it helped them to develop an internationalist perspective on labor conditions and relations with their union brothers and sisters. In this period union about two dozen or so unionists were exposed to Australia, New Zealand, Greece, Yugoslavia, etc. Some, like the study trip to Cuba by the ILWU’s Secretary-Treasurer Newton Miyagi, were controversial both within and outside of the union; however, most of the educational study teams went to less controversial places, broadened members’ perspectives, and grounded the policy positions taken by the union.

In 1960, Yagi applied for the International Education Program offered by the union. The ILWU was still committed to the doctrine of organizing and cooperating with workers around the world, and Okinawa was chaffing under the continuing U.S. Occupation. After completing the union-funded three-country study tour portion of the trip, he took a self-funded side trip to Okinawa.

“But the whole concept came on the basis — that’s the reason why we were, in 1960, I went as a chairman of a three-man committee to Japan, India, Calcutta, Hong Kong, and later I went to Okinawa. These were the overseas delegation. Some of them went to Cuba, some of them went to the European countries. To Greece as well as... This was to make us fully understand worldwide problems or worldwide workers’ problems and see how that ... We were advised, warned, that don’t compare the standard that we are living with the other countries, poor countries. And these are the kinds of things they made us understand. But prior to that we have lots of disagreements.” (Interview with T Yagi, December 19, 1989 p. 501).

Upon his return, Yagi briefed ILWU’s Education director, Dave Thompson, about the

Ed - Carstons

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JAN 20 1951



FUND DRIVE TO HELP WORKERS IN OKINAWA

Dear Friend:

To assist and encourage the **LABOR MOVEMENT** in Okinawa and to foster and promote the close relationship which has existed between the workers in Okinawa and Hawaii, we ask your support in a drive to raise funds for the purpose of purchasing: 1. Printing equipment & supplies 2. Office equipment & supplies 3. Literature & other materials.

The workers in Okinawa are paid grossly inadequate wages of \$1.00 to \$1.50 for an 8-hour to 10-hour day. Less than 12,000 of the 180,000 Okinawans in the work force are members of labor unions.

Your contribution will help those less fortunate than you. Please give generously to:

HAWAII COMMITTEE TO HELP WORKERS IN OKINAWA

- Seiko "Shirley" Shiroma, Oahu
- Yasuki Arakaki, Hawaii
- Thomas Yagi, Maui
- Stanford Kiyonaga, Kauai
- Shiro Hokama, Lanai

Handwritten Japanese text, likely a translation or commentary on the flyer's content, including details about the labor conditions in Okinawa and the purpose of the fund drive.

[Figure 2. KOKUA Flyer of FUND DRIVE TO HELP WORKERS IN OKINAWA. Source: ILWU Local 142 Archives]

conditions he witnessed in Okinawa. They then organized an effort to support workers in Okinawa. The flyer shown below was one of the results of Yagi's actions. The illustration of raised arms and a sign "KOKUA" (help out) was drawn by Thompson. In addition to Yagi, contact persons on the flyer include other Okinawan names: Seiko Shiroma, Yasuki Arakaki, Shiro Hokama. Clearly, the degree of cooperation between the ILWU and the

Okinawan labor movement is an area where further research is required.²⁾

Perhaps this accounts for why Yagi was among the few Okinawan nisei who supported the reversion movement. At a time when most Okinawan nisei, even some of his colleagues in the labor movement, questioned the wisdom of Okinawa returning to Japan, Yagi's was one of the few voices that countered the dominant narrative of Okinawa's great progress under the U.S. Occupation.

Many, if not most nisei Okinawans' positions on reversion mostly mirrored the American military's — that the “Ryukyuan” should remain under American control. Since the post-war Relief and Reconstruction efforts of Okinawa in Hawai'i had depended so much on U.S. military cooperation to transport the items, Okinawans in Hawai'i were generally used to working with the U.S. military. As second generation Okinawans, and first-generation Americans, the nisei were mostly educated in the American educational system in the midst of the Americanization movement (Tamura 1994), and inculcated with patriotism and supported American militarism. In this sense, Thomas Yagi was probably one of the few nisei who was able to consciously link his Okinawan identity with his organizer identity and critique the buildup of American bases.

5. “Democratic Revolution” and Okinawan Politicians

Unions focusing exclusively on the collective bargaining process can only be partly effective for their membership. Workplaces are as much governed by conditions, frameworks and regulations determined outside the workplace as within the contract. Recognizing that influencing that larger social arenas would ultimately help their rank and file members, Hawai'i unions got involved in electoral politics as well. They established Political Action Committees (PACs). They lobbied for raising the minimum wage, enacting worker's compensation, occupational safety and health laws, temporary disability insurance (TDI), civil rights, health insurance, etc. — as *social rights* for all workers, even those workers not covered by negotiated contracts. Since these social rights function as parameter setters (i.e., as *minima* or “floors”), unions were able to stabilize their own gains and improve their positions in their collective bargaining process.

For more than a half century after becoming a Territory, the Republican Party was the dominant party in the Hawaii Territorial Legislature. The Republican Party was closely aligned with the business elites of the major corporations which dominated the economy of the territory. These corporations — Alexander and Baldwin; Castle and Cooke, C. Brewer, American Factors, and Theo. H. Davies — were known as the “Big Five” and, through interlocking directorates and intermarriage among the upper class families, controlled much of the economic and social life of the Hawaiian Islands (Shoemaker, 1940; Beechert, 1985).

As early as 1944, the ILWU had worked to elect politicians in both parties who might be friendly to their interests — 16 House members and 8 Senators in the Territorial legislature. A year later, in 1945, the Territorial Legislature enacted the Hawaii Employment

Relations Act (now HRS 377), often called the "Little Wagner Act," which extended the "right to organize a union and collectively bargain" provisions of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 to all of Hawai'i's workers. In so doing, Hawai'i became the first place in the United States to permit even agricultural workers the right to unionize and collectively bargain with their employers. The following year, from September to November in 1946, the ILWU led 21,000 sugar workers throughout the islands in a successful 79-day strike against the Hawaii Employer's Council — winning many important provisions such as the discontinuation of the perquisite system, the mechanism which had been used to capriciously reward or punish, and therefore, control workers.³⁾ A pineapple strike followed in 1947, and then in 1949 dock workers struck for a contentious six month period to win parity with dockworkers on the West Coast. The power of the ILWU and the CIO-model of organizing to shut down everything from sugar plantations to the docks was amply demonstrated.

However, organized labor's increasing power in Hawai'i and on the continent also brought other challenges. Another "Red Scare" was spreading across the nation and unions and their leadership were targets. In Hawai'i, Governor Ingram M. Stainback declared war on communism in Hawai'i 1946. On November 25, 1947, teachers Dr. John and Aiko Reinecke were suspended indefinitely without pay from their public school positions. Among the 11-point charges, mostly for being Communists, was the charge "for not possessing the ideals of democracy" (Holmes, 1994, p. 46). The territorial legislature passed a concurrent resolution requesting that the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigate the degree of internal subversion in the territory. Seven individuals, several of them directly or indirectly connected to the ILWU, were charged with being Communists and with plotting to overthrow the government of the United States. The "Hawaii Seven," as they were called, were Jack Hall, John Reinecke, Koji Ariyoshi, Jack Kimoto, Jim Freeman, Charles Fujimoto and his wife Eileen Fujimoto.⁴⁾

The HUAC required union officers to testify at these hearings, and the organizers were subpoenaed. When they and others refused to testify, citing their Constitutional rights under the Fifth Amendment of the Bill of Rights against self-incrimination, they became known as the "Reluctant Thirty-Nine." Many nisei were among this group, and the Okinawans included Yagi, Arashiro, Arakaki, and others. The dilemma facing many of these subpoenaed men and women was that many of them indeed had signed Communist Party member cards, but only to access the skills and assistance required in organizing, and to bring more democratic practices into their workplaces. Indeed, they were more "unionists" than "Communists." For Yagi and others, refusing to respond to the question by citing the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination, was the most accurate and appropriate response. It also meant that he faced social ostracism in the community because he was "indicted, though, but was acquitted, and was not convicted." (Yagi interview, p. 490).

In the midst of the anti-Communist hysteria, another arena was undergoing

change — politics. Here a coalition of three interest groups were organizing to revitalize the lackluster Democratic Party. One part of the coalition was an assortment of traditional Democrats. Another part of the coalition included organized labor. The third were returning young, educated nisei veterans of units such as the 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and the Military Intelligence Service. This demographic bump of young, educated nisei desiring to participate in the political life of the territory was significant. Having demonstrated their bravery and loyalty to the U.S. at extraordinary high costs, having survived the Second World War—even as some of their families were internment camps--this last group of Democrats were not about to return to the same paternalistic society they had left during the war. Together, with the leadership of a former police officer (and later Governor) named John A. Burns, the coalition was able to pull together a grass-roots campaign that gave the Democratic Party the dominance in the Legislature which it has held over the past fifty-plus years.

Probably the best known Okinawan in Democratic Party politics was the late Robert “Bob” Oshiro. For over thirty years, his name was the synonymous with Democratic Party politics as one of the key grass-roots strategists. Born and raised in the pineapple plantation town of Wahiawā, of parents who had immigrated from Okinawa, he graduated from Mid-Pacific High School (because Leilehua High School, where he had been attending, had been taken over by the military during the war). While attending the University of Hawai‘i, he was drafted and trained as a Military Intelligence Service interpreter; the war ended just as he was en route to Japan, making him one of the first soldiers in the occupation of Japan. After discharge, he returned home and completed his education at the University of Hawai‘i; however, his graduation was ill-timed. The 1949 Great Hawaiian Dock Strike was on. Unable to find a job, he decided to use his remaining veteran’s educational benefits and went to Duke University Law School. Inspired by one of his professors, who had taught about the potential of lawyers to be social engineers, he returned in 1953 to set up a law office in his home town of Wahiawā. Oshiro got involved in precinct politics just on the eve of the 1954 elections and the “Democratic Revolution” which swept the Democrats into the status of majority party in the Territorial Legislature. After a half century of Republican Party rule, Oshiro reflected:

“I think the most exciting thing about it all is that all of us came out with a conviction that it can be done. I think that’s the most significant thing that came out of that election, and you know, that’s very important. Today, when you look at the world over, you find all kinds of methods of trying to change society. I think in ’54, that gave us hope, tremendous hope, that this is the avenue that we should work towards, if we want to bring about changes — whether it’s political, economic or social . . . That reinforced the thinking of many of us. (Oshiro Interview, p. 1374)

Oshiro went on to serve in the Legislature as a Clerk, and then as an elected Representative from his district of Wahiawā. Although he is often credited for having put together successful campaigns for at least three governors and a number of congressional officials, he was most proud of helping to pass legislation that consolidated the multiple school

boards in the Territory (later, the State) to a statewide Board of Education where schools could count on uniform levels of funding, and provide a measure of equity for students among the different school districts.

Another Okinawan legislator, Representative Yoshito Takamine eventually became the long-standing chair of the House Labor Committee. He was born and raised in Honoka'a. Unlike his two older sisters, he was able to finish high school; however, like many other nisei on the sugar plantations, he could not afford to go on to college. Consequently, he went to work for the sugar company, working in the field machinery department unloading the sugar cane for processing. Like Yagi and Arakaki, it was because he worked on the industrial side, that he got involved in the labor movement — He signed up in July of 1944. In the 1946 Strike, he was assigned to look over the needs of strikers along the Hamakua coast. Takamine remembers it as a well-run strike with a host of committees (e.g., communications, picketing, soup kitchen, hunting, fishing, “bumming,” social morale, etc.). He recalled the only problem was one of providing striking workers with white rice (the CIO partners on the West Coast had mistakenly sent brown rice). In 1958, Takamine reluctantly got into politics, at the last minute when the ILWU and the Democratic Party couldn't find anyone else to run for the seat of Representative from the Third District. He won by a scant thirty-two votes, but thereafter repeatedly reelected for the next twenty-four years. Takamine noted:

“I spent most of my time chairing the labor committee. Because there was much work to be done in the area of minimum wage, workmen's comp, unemployment comp, safety, and all those basic labor laws. . . . Dave Thompsons was deeply involved in education. Education, you know, for children, uh the future of children, the future of the state. So it was the Department of Education, University of Hawaii.” (Takamine interview, p. 18)

Indeed, during his tenure as Representative and Chair of the House Labor Committee, the Legislature enacted several important pieces of legislation which have made the State of Hawai'i as one of the most progressive in the nation: increases in the Minimum Wage; the Hawaii Worker's Compensation in 1963; Temporary Disability Insurance Act in 1969; and the Employer Pre-paid Health Insurance Act in 1974.

Other Okinawans politicians elected to the Legislature included Matsuki “Mutt” Arashiro, whose career on the island of Kauai spanned both labor and politics; Akira Sakima who was part of the group that delivered milking goats to Okinawa in the Relief and Reconstruction period, chaired the Education Committee for many years; Peter Iha; Robert Taira; Marshall Ige; Ken Kiyabu and the first woman Uchinanchu Legislator, Patsy (Miyahira) Young, just to name a few. All ran as Democrats; the only Republican Legislator was Robert Teruya.

The Legislature was not the only political arena in which Okinawans were involved. Another Okinawan labor activist who was also involved in the political arena was Seiko “Shirley” Shiroma. As an organizer for Kahuku Plantation, Shiroma was active both within the ILWU, and in the community. Realizing that most workers' children attended

public schools, he ran for and won a seat on the Board of Education. At the time he was the general manager of the Union Insurance Service (which had been started by the ILWU and United Public Workers unions, and which was later purchased by the AIG). Union Insurance Service provided unionized workers with affordable automobile and other forms of insurance, a service that had previously been unavailable to them because of the expensive rates that the large commercial corporations charged. Shiroma was an advocate for better educational standards, confronting schools principals on the way in which civics education was being presented. He advocated for a tougher curriculum with clearer expectations of content mastery rather than simply teaching general attitudes. In a speech to the annual State Secondary Principals' Conference, he said "Our experience is that where the schools teach attitudes on labor questions they are anti-union attitudes." (HA 11/29/1969).

6. Consciousness of and Relevance of Okinawan identity

In several conversations I had with the late Ah Quon Leong McElrath, retired ILWU social worker, life-long community activist, and former member of the Board of Regents of the University of Hawai'i, we often discussed the differences that characterized the Okinawan union organizers and membership (compared to the Japanese). According to her, "The Okinawans were different, more militant. You should check out the *Yoen Jiho*." It seems that the *Yoen Jiho*, the Japanese-language paper might have played an important part in the formation of the ideas of the Okinawan issei radicals (Wakukawa, 1981); how much these ideas might have affected the nisei remains an area that requires further study.

What we do know is that most labor and political leaders acknowledged their Okinawan ancestry without hesitation. While Okinawan identity may not have been the primary impetus of their activism, it was "in the mix." For example, Yasuki Arakaki was conscious about the discrimination that he and other Okinawans faced vis-à-vis the Japanese. He described how his relationship with his Naichi girlfriend had to be terminated because he was Okinawan. It angered him to be rejected because of her parents' prejudice, but he also recalled his mother's comments about avoiding relationships with people whom she called "Molokai-hito." Arakaki subsequently married a Hawaiian woman, whom his mother accepted unconditionally. Arakaki's ability to recognize parallels in the discrimination against Okinawans and against people whose relatives had contracted Hansen's Disease and had been sent to Kalaupapa on Molokai island probably enhanced his ability to connect with people of various backgrounds, critical to his success in organizing.

Probably the person who most identified with his Okinawan identity and could see its transnational implications, was Tom Yagi. In late January and early February of 1960 six legislators of Okinawan ancestry visited Okinawa for ten days as guests of the United States Commission on Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR), transported by U.S. Military Transport. They included: Rep. Yoshito Takamine (D); Robert C. Oshiro

(D); Rep. Akira Sakima (D); Rep. Peter S. Iha (D); Robert E. Teruya (R); Sen. Matsuki Arashiro (D). The delegation later issued statements marveling at the progress Okinawa had made since the war’s end. They spoke about the new roads, new buildings, etc. and, for the most part, favored the continuation of American Occupation of Okinawa, this despite the increasing volume of voices within Okinawa petitioning have Okinawa returned to Japan (HSB 1, 26, 1960). It appeared that USCAR’s objective of the delegation’s visit was generally accomplished. However, Maui Division’s Tom Yagi presented a counter argument based on his own site visit to Okinawa; he was one of the lone voices among Hawai‘i nisei Okinawans to counter USCAR’s and the six legislators’ perspectives.

In many respects, then, this examination of Okinawans and their roles in the labor and political moments in Hawai‘i has found patterns similar to those discovered earlier by Jung (2006). Like Jung, I submit that Okinawans conceptualized and practiced interracial politics and they did not merely give up “race” and/or “culture” for “class.” It was in particular movements that for them *class* became *racialized*, as in their attacks against the “Big Five” which became *haole-ized (made “white”)*. At the same time, Caucasians like John A. Burns or Jack Hall, was de-racialized, made “Local” or “one of them.” After all, Harry Kamoku, the Hawaiian activist-organizer on the Hilo docks, workers were “brothers under the skin.” (Puette, 1986, p. 4) Similarly, while the Okinawans were conscious of and critical of the Naichi Japanese disregard of Okinawans as a group, they did not forego opportunities to work with them, or with Filipinos, or other ethnic groups. In other words, Okinawans in the progressive movements of the mid-twentieth century negotiated their Okinawan identities by the particular requirements of specific situations; in the end, it was a strategy which helped them to bring about modern Hawai‘i.

Discussion and Conclusion

Okinawans *sojourned* to Hawai‘i at a particular historical moment, and *settled* here just as critical historical events were occurring. Additionally, the resulting sizeable nisei generation came of age at the critical moments of Hawai‘i’s labor and political history. They participated in the social structural changes the islands underwent in the mid-twentieth century, in the both the labor movement and the political ousting of the hegemonic Republican Party. Together, these movements disrupted and transformed the society, both in terms of industrial relations and civil society, into a modern-day Hawai‘i.

In this paper I have argued that the results of Okinawan and other multi-ethnic labor and political activist were the mandated access to employer pre-paid health insurance, worker’s compensation, unemployment benefits, etc. — some of the rights taken for granted by workers in the fiftieth state today. Civil rights which exceed the national floor — for women, in education, etc. These are some of the reforms that Okinawans nisei facilitated, in conjunction with their other fellow workers and legislators. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) organizing style in the ILWU might have been the over-

all strategy, but on the ground in Hawai‘i, it took individual organizers like Tom Yagi, Yasu Arakaki, Matsuki Arashiro, Shiro Hokama, Toyo Oshiro and many others. In the government, it was through people like Yoshito Takamine, Goro Hokama, Robert Oshiro, Akira Sakima, and so many others, that progressive legislation could take place — many of the programs and policies that we take for granted today.

In conclusion, it may be true that Okinawans in Hawai‘i, as a social category, currently live relatively comfortable middle class lives; they are often home-owners, employed, hard-working, playing by the rules, etc. However, especially in a multi-ethnic societal context like Hawai‘i, where ethnicity is often correlated with social class, it is inappropriate to tautologically explain socioeconomic status in terms of ethnicity. Variations in educational and income attainment, housing, etc. are not simply a result of adherence to cultural norms, values and practices. This “good values” reasoning can lead to an uncritical acceptance of the “model minority” myth, and block seeing how larger social forces have affected, and continue to affect their lives. The affluence that is taken for granted today is as much, if not more, a product of the labor and political movements of the mid-1900s, as from individual or small collective efforts. These social movements, in which nisei Okinawans were located and contributed to, came about because of their demographic and class location. They worked on behalf of the all workers and citizens, not just themselves, and in the process, benefited themselves. Conditions in the 21st century are quite different. Okinawan sansei and yonsei have smaller families, or no children. The entry of new immigrants from Asia and the Pacific, the reassertion of Hawaiian nationalism, and the rise of reactionary politics dismantled the progressive gains there needs to be much more reflection on the part of Okinawans to be more reflective about their present status and the extent which the past upward trajectory can be sustained. Perhaps the conversations should instead Okinawans should ask: what can we learn from previous generations of Uchinanchu to bring about a more just and peaceful society so that everyone, not just Uchinanchu, can benefit?

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS AND MATERIALS

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Center for Oral History Interviews

Interview with Thomas Yagi, November 9, 1989.

Interview with Robert Oshiro, April 7, 1988

Interview with Yasuki Arakaki, March 19, 1991.

University of Hawai‘i -West O‘ahu, Center for Labor Education and Research, *Rice and Roses* Hawaii Labor History Interviews

Interview with Yoshito Takamine, June 17, 1996 *Rice and Roses*

Interview with Seiko Shiroma, April 4, 1996, *Rice and Roses*

Interview with Ah Quon McElrath, May 26, 2004

Okinawa Prefectural Archives.

National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 260 Records of the United States Occupation Headquarters, World War II Records of the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR), The Public Affairs Department, The Information Division, Box No. 339 of HCRI-PA, Cataloged by the National Diet Library Japan and the Okinawa Prefectural Archives.

Okinawan Labor and Political Activists in Hawai‘i

Figure 1. Description: “Participants in the ILWU and California Labor School leadership training program for Hawaii Unionists with ILWU President Harry Bridges, San Francisco, February-April 1946.”

Arakaki (second from left), Yagi (third from left)

Credit: ILWU Local 142 archives.

Figure 2. “‘KOKUA’ flyer for Okinawa.” Sketch of 10 arms holding a picket sign “KOKUA”

Credit: ILWU Local 142 archives

Notes

- 1) I gratefully acknowledge the assistance that Rae Shiraki, archivist at the ILWU Local 142, and Gene Vrana, librarian at the ILWU International Library, provided me with their collections. Also, Yuko Kakinoohana at the Okinawa Prefectural Archives provided me with much assistance accessing the Kotani-Kimoto Interviews. I also thank Bob Ellefson and the *IJOS* reviewers for their editorial assistance.
- 2) There were three separate conferences ostensibly organized by Harry Bridges, President of the ILWU, although the official organization was the “All Pacific & Asian Dockworkers Corresponding Committee.” The first was held in Tokyo beginning on May 11, 1959 and running three days. Harry Bridges and regional directors of the ILWU, including Hawaii’s Jack Hall attended. From Okinawa, Mr. Makoto Motomura participated. In his report which ran some nine pages, Mr. Motomura spoke of the occupation of Okinawa, noting “. . . there is an Okinawa among U.S. military bases.” He refers to nuclear bases taking land from Okinawans: “Hundreds of farmers, workers and students who fought in opposition were arrested and put in prisons.”
A second conference was held again in Tokyo from June 15–17, 1961. The report on the Hawaii Labor Situation was delivered by Mr. Noboru Miyamoto, basically on the history of the development of the ILWU in Hawai‘i, concluding with a concern over mechanization and automation. The Report on the Okinawan Labor Situation was delivered by Mr. Hideo Taira (pp. 58–64). He noted that “at least five of the thirteen members of the Okinawan delegation were refused their passports.” A third conference was held in Djakarta, Indonesia from Oct 4–9, 1963. No Okinawans were listed among the delegates from Japan. (ILWU Archives, Honolulu, HI, “International Workers connections” file).
- 3) Perquisites included “free” housing, health care, charge accounts at the plantation store, etc. Because they were “given” to workers, they could be assigned at the will of the plantation managers. When workers were not compliant, they could be reassigned to lower quality homes or, as frequently occurred during strikes, evicted from their housing. Without the perquisite system, workers no longer could be evicted from their homes as long as they were up-to-date in their rental payments.
- 4) Of the seven, only Hall was directly related to the ILWU. Mrs. Fujimoto worked in a secretarial position for the union for a time.

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