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History of Labor in Hawai'i *

The *Maka'āinana*, Ancient Hawai'i to 1850

In ancient Hawai'i a complicated but definite family structure determined a person's place in the class system of society, and religion sanctified and unified the cultural, social and economic order.

The *maka'āinana*, or common people were allotted a plot of ground by their chief. Here they planted, irrigated, nurtured and harvested taro, sweet potatoes and other crops. They raised pigs, dogs and chickens to supplement their diet, and they had the right to fish in the sea or in protected fish ponds.

The *maka'āinana* worked for the chief 6 days each month, fought in the chief's wars, and paid taxes in the form of goods produced. Order and discipline were maintained through a strict code of laws, known as the *kapu* system. Government and religion were one, so breaking a sacred *kapu* was a sacrilege as well as a crime. Offenses great or small were generally punished by death.

Despite the labor commoners were required to render each month to their chief, there was still ample time for leisure activity. Once a year there was a *Makahiki* or gathering which lasted four months. During this period there were feasts, fun and games. The Hawaiians developed a carefree attitude toward life. They had no fear of want or hunger on the morrow. They developed a nature that was open-hearted. Sharing, giving and partaking of one's neighbors' goods was an accepted way of living.

The working relationships, the religion and the life style changed quickly after Captain Cook came. The white men began to trade ships and guns and other white men's goods for sandalwood, called "*Iliahi*" in Hawaiian. When Kamehameha I gained a monopoly over the sandalwood trade, he ordered his sub chiefs to send their *maka'āinana* into the hills to collect it. Without knowing it, he was changing the production-for-use economy into a production-for-profit economy.

The chiefs in their zeal for a share in the profits made the common people spend more and more time collecting sandalwood. An eyewitness reported,

On one occasion we saw nearly two thousand persons, laden with fagots of sandalwood, coming down from the mountains to deposit their burthens in the royal

store houses, and then depart to their homes--wearied with their unpaid labors, yet unmurmuring in their bondage. In fact, the condition of the common people is that of slaves; they hold nothing which may not be taken from them by the strong hand of arbitrary power, whether exercised by the sovereign or a petty chief. -April 18, 1822.¹

At its height the sandalwood trade brought in \$400,000 a year to Hawai'i. But while the trade grew the people of the nation were being ruined. They paid taxes in sandalwood. Logs replaced money because of the scarcity of coin.

Within a few years the supply of *'iliahi* began to dwindle. This contributed to the decline of the Hawaiian population. The work in the damp uplands combined with near starvation conditions and the scourge of the white man's diseases wiped out large numbers of the native Hawaiians.

Kamehameha's successor, Liholiho, did not have his father's force of personality, nor was he the shrewd business man his father was. Kamehameha paid for everything in cash or an equivalent in goods. Liholiho turned to credit, promising to pay for the luxuries of western civilization in sandalwood. Within two years after Kamehameha I had died, the lavish spending spree of Liholiho and his royal court brought the national debt to \$220,000. The king could not get the support of the alii without offering them a share in the profits of sandalwood. They in turn put greater and greater pressure on the common people.

Liholiho's successor, Kamehameha III was faced with the demands of the foreign merchants for payment. In 1827 he issued a decree which may be considered Hawai'i's first written tax law:

Every man is required to deliver a half picul of good sandalwood [a picul being 133 lbs.] to the governor of the district to which he belongs, on or before the 1st day of September, 1827; in case of not being able to procure the sandalwood, four Spanish dollars, or any property worth that sum, will be taken in payment.

No person, except those who are infirm, or too advanced an age to go to the mountains, will be exempted from this law.

Every woman of the age of 13 years or upwards, is to pay a mat, 12 feet long and 6 wide, or tapa of equal value, (to such a mat,) or the sum of one Spanish dollar, on or before the 1st day of September, 1827.²

This harsh decree did not alleviate the economic plight of the kingdom. Sandalwood was, in fact, rapidly disappearing. Soon the forests were stripped bare. The native workers could now return home where many found only famine and death.

By 1829 the sandalwood trade ended, and within a year of the breaking of the kapu, in 1820, the missionaries arrived from New England. It was their goal to bring civilization as the white man understood it to what they considered a savage, pagan people. Inadvertently, they were preparing the populace for its own exploitation. For as well as preaching the Christian gospel, the missionaries also tried to enforce their own protestant work ethic, which extolled hard work itself as a form of

piety and regarded success in business as a sign of God's blessing.

This and the equally alien principle of the personal ownership of land placed increasing pressure on the Hawaiians to give up their communal style of life and to work under contract for pay at the kind of labor that the missionaries and merchants and, later, the planters could recognize as "honest employment."

WHALING:

Coinciding with the period of the greatest activity of the missionaries, a new industry entered the Hawaiian scene. The cry of "Whale ho!" ushered a dramatic change in the economic, political and community life of the islands. The sailors wanted fresh vegetables and the native Hawaiians turned the temperate uplands into vast truck farms. There was a demand for fresh fruit, cattle, white potatoes and sugar. These, too, were grown and supplied by the native population. Merchants, mostly white men (or *haole* as the Hawaiians called them) became rich.

Meanwhile the ships crews brought to the islands not only romantic notions, but diseases to which the Hawaiians lacked resistance. Venereal disease, tuberculosis and even measles, which in most white communities was no more than a passing childhood illness, took their toll in depopulating the kingdom.

The whaling industry was the mainstay of the island economy for about 40 years. Fortunes were founded upon industries related to it and these were the forerunners of the money interests that were to dominate the economy of the islands for a century to come. And then swiftly whaling came to an end. The whales, like the native Hawaiians, were being reduced in population because of the hunters. In 1859 an oil well was discovered and developed in Pennsylvania. Within a few years this new type of oil replaced whale oil for lamps and many other uses.

Whaling left in its wake a legacy of disease and death. It wiped out three-fourths of the native Hawaiians. It shifted much of the population from the countryside to the cities and reduced the self-sufficiency of the people. In short, it wreaked havoc on the traditional values and beliefs of the Hawaiian culture. By 1870, Samuel Kamakau would complain that the Hawaiian people were destitute; their clothing and provisions imported. Instead of practicing their traditional skills, farming, fishing, canoe-building, net-making, painting kau'ula tapas, etc., Hawaiians had become "mere vagabonds":

Because of the foreign ways of the race, they have abandoned the works of the ancestors and have become lazy and make a living by peddling, a practice despised by the ancestors, who used to say contemptuously, "Child of a peddler!" (*Keiki a ka ma'au'auwa!*)³

Whaling also introduced the concept of "hiring on" for a long period of time. Just as sailors signed on for a voyage that normally lasted years, so were workers indentured for work on the burgeoning sugar plantation industry.

THE GREAT MAHELE:

In 1848 the king was persuaded to apply yet another force to the already rapidly evolving Hawaiian way of life. The dividing up of the land known as "The Great *Mahele*" in that year introduced and institutionalized the private ownership or leasing of land tracts, a development which would prove to be indispensable to the continued growth of the sugar growing industry.

The *Mahele* was hailed as a benevolent redistribution of the wealth of the land, but in practice the common people were cheated. Of 4 million acres of land the makaʻāinana ended up with less than 30,000 acres. This is considerably less than 1 acre per person. By contrast the 250 chiefs got over a million and a half acres. King Kamehameha III kept almost a million acres for himself. And there was close to another million and a half acres that were considered government lands.⁴

As expected, within a few years the sugar agricultural interests, mostly haole, had obtained leases or outright possession of a major portion of the best cane land.

SUGAR:

Sugar cane had long been an important crop planted by the Hawaiians of old. Its sweet and nourishing sap was a favorite of chiefs and commoners alike. Industrial production of sugar began at Kōloa Plantation on Kauaʻi in 1840. It soon became clear that it required a lot of manpower, and manpower was in short supply. Where it is estimated that in the days of Captain Cook the population stood at 300,000, in the middle of the nineteenth century about one fourth of that number of Hawaiians were left.

Native Hawaiians, who had been accustomed to working only for their chiefs and only on a temporary basis as a "labor tax" or *ʻAuhau Hana*, naturally had difficulty in adjusting to the back-breaking work of clearing the land, digging irrigation ditches, planting, fertilizing, weeding, and harvesting the cane, for an alien planter and on a daily ten to twelve hour shift. A song of the day captures the feelings of these first Hawaiian laborers:

PUA MANA NO

Nonoke au i ka maki ko,
I ka mahi ko.
Ua ʻeha ke kua, kakahe ka hou,
Poho, Poho.
A ʻaiʻe au i ka hale kuʻai,
A ʻaiʻe au i ka hale kuʻai.
A noho hoʻi he pua mana no,
A noho hoʻi he pua mana no.

A haʻalele au i kaʻimi dala,
Dala poho.
E noho no e hana ma ka la,
Kaʻai o ka la.

SURE A POOR MAN

I labored on a sugar plantation,
Growing sugarcane.
My back ached, my sweat poured,
All for nothing.
I fell in debt to the plantation store,
I fell in debt to the plantation store.
And remained a poor man,
And remained a poor man.

I decided to quit working for money,
Money to lose.
Far better work day by day,
Grow my own daily food.

Ia ha'i ka waiwai e luhi ai,
Ia ha'i ka waiwai e luhi ai,
E noho au he pua mana no,
E noho au he pua mana no.

No more laboring so others get rich,
No more laboring so others get rich.
Just go on being a poor man,
Just go on being a poor man.

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This resistance on the part of the Hawaiians to work for money, when the old style of working for themselves and their families suited them better, came to a head just a few years after the first sugar plantation opened at Kōloa. In 1841 local Hawaiians walked off their jobs in the first recorded Hawaiian strike. Not actually organized into a union, the Hawaiian workers who were being paid in scrip instead of cash, stayed out for eight days to get a pay increase.

Though this strike was not successful, it showed the owners that the native Hawaiians would not long endure such demeaning conditions of work. Faced, therefore, with an ever diminishing Hawaiian workforce that was clearly on the verge of organizing more effectively, the Sugar planters themselves organized to solve their labor problems.

INDUSTRIAL MONOPOLY: 1850-1900

"COOLIE" LABOR:

The Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society organized to protect the interests of the plantation owners and to secure their supply of and control over cheap field labor. The first group of Chinese recruited came under five year contracts at \$3.00 a month plus passage, food, clothing and a house. An advance of \$6 was made in China to be refunded in small installments.

From the beginning there was a deliberate policy of separation of the races, pitting one against the other as a goal to get more production out of them.

The President of the Agricultural Society, Judge Wm. Lee, advised the planters in these words:

To all those planters who can afford it, I would say, procure as many laborers as you can, and work them by themselves, as far as possible separate from the natives, and you will find that, if well managed, their example will have a stimulating effect upon the Hawaiian, who is naturally jealous of the coolie and ambitious to outdo him."⁶

The back-breaking work was 26 days a month and 10 or more hours per day. Fierce overseers, known as Luna, rode on horses carrying whips which they were not hesitant to use on the workers.

The planters were determined to obtain and hold a "stable" labor force, and in this the planters had the assistance of the law.

MASTERS AND SERVANTS (*Na Haku A Me Na Kauwa*):

From June 21st, 1850 laborers were subject to a strict law known as the Masters and Servants

Law. Under the provisions of this law, enacted just a few weeks after the founding of the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society, two different forms of labor contracts were legalized, apprenticeships and indentured service. Under this law, absenteeism or refusal to work could cause a contract laborer to be apprehended by the district magistrate or police officer and subsequently sentenced to work for the employer an extra amount of time after the contract expired, usually double the time of the absence.

For those contract laborers who found conditions unbearable and tried to run away, again the law permitted their employers "coercive force" to apprehend them, and their contracts on the plantation would be extended by double the period of time they had been away. If such a worker then refused to serve, he could be jailed and sentenced to hard labor until he gave in. The law, therefore, made it virtually impossible for the workers to organize labor unions or to participate in strikes. Indeed, the law was only a slight improvement over outright slavery.

Even the mildest and most benign attempts to challenge the power of the plantations were quashed. One early Japanese contract laborer in Hilo tried to get the courts to rule that his labor contract should be illegal since he was unwilling to work for Hilo Sugar Company, and such involuntary servitude was supposed to be prohibited by the Hawaiian Constitution, but the court, of course, upheld the Masters and Servant's Act and the harsh labor contracts (Hilo Sugar vs. Mioshi 1891). A far more brutal and shameful act was committed against another one of the first contract laborers or "*imin*" who dared to remain in Hawai'i after his contract and try to open a small business in Honoka'a. His name was Katsu Goto, and one night, after riding out to help some other *imin* with an English translation, he was assaulted, beaten, and lynched [[read more](#)].

It should be noted, as Hawai'i's National Labor Relations Board officer first remarked, that "our Hawaiian advocates of "free enterprise," like their mainland confreres, never hesitated to call upon the government to interfere with business for their special benefit."⁷ For a hundred years, the "special interests" of the planters would control unhindered, the laws of Hawai'i as a Kingdom, a Republic and Territory.

In the United States, most of the sugar was produced in the South, so with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1864, the demand and, therefore, the price for sugar increased dramatically. The Hawaiian sugar industry expanded to meet these needs and so the supply of plantation laborers had to be increased as well. The Kingdom set up a Bureau of Immigration to assist the planters as more and more Chinese were brought in, this time for 5 year contracts at \$4. a month plus food and shelter.

Even the famous American novelist Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, while visiting the islands in 1866 was taken in by the planters' logic. Normally a foe of racism and economic servitude, he accepted entirely the plantation sentiment that the Chinese in Hawai'i were the dregs of their society. He wryly commented that, "Their Former trade of cutting throats on the China seas has made them uncommonly handy at cutting cane."⁸ Having observed the operations of plantations throughout the south and in California, Clemens knew exactly how low the "coolie" wages were by comparison and expected the rest of the country to soon follow the example of the

Hawai'i planters. He wrote:

You will not always go on paying \$80 and \$100 a month for labor which you can hire for \$5. ... It cheapens no labor of man's hands save the hardest and most excruciating drudgery ---drudgery which all white men abhor and are glad to escape from."⁹

The planters who wanted cheap labor spoke of them as good workers. But as their number increased and they began to leave the plantations and enter the labor market of the towns, an outcry was raised against them. An article in *All About Hawaii* of 1890 warned that, "Hawaii is going to lapse into a Chinese colony without making a struggle to prevent it."¹⁰ Two years later a drastic law was passed that Chinese could only engage in agricultural field work or in work actually connected with the running and operation of rice and sugar mills.

When the Chinese laborer was needed he was praised as quiet, skillful, obedient, patient and quick to learn. When he left the plantation and entered the open labor market, or went into business, he was condemned as a murderer, cutthroat, thief, selfish and cunning. These and other racist epithets were used to deride his ethnic background. It is estimated that between 1850 and 1900 about 46,000 Chinese came to Hawai'i. The problems of the immigrants were complicated by the fact that almost the entire recruitment of labor was of males only. In 1884, the Chinese were 22 percent of the population and held 49 percent of the plantation field jobs. In the period since then their proportion to the total population has declined to about 6%. By 1932 the Chinese had mostly left plantation work.

In 1876 the sugar industry was again stimulated by the Sugar Reciprocity Treaty signed with the United States which permitted Hawaiian sugar to be sold in the U.S. without tariff restrictions thus giving the island kingdom an advantage over other sugar growing areas.

Once more the planters began looking around for plantation labor. They experimented with many nationalities. They imported South Sea Islanders, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Germans, Russians, Spaniards, Norwegians, and even more Chinese. Always the goal was the same. "Divide and rule." They wanted servile labor and cheap labor that would be unable to organize and assert itself.

The Committee on Labor of the Planters' Labor and Supply Company wrote in 1883: "...the experience of sugar growing, the world over, goes to prove that cheap labor, which means in plain words, servile labor, must be employed in order to render this enterprise successful."¹¹

In order to keep labor servile and costs down, it was a conscious policy to introduce a surplus of labor. In 1883 the Planters' Monthly commented, "...let immigrants come here in large numbers and the market will break, so to speak. John Chinaman will have to work or starve."¹² A year later there was a further jubilant comment in the Planters' Monthly which said, "The arrival of Chinese from China recently has resulted in a decided fall in the rate of wages."¹³

JAPANESE IMMIGRATION:

Of all the groups brought in for plantation labor, the largest was from Japan. Before the century

had closed over 80,000 Japanese had been imported. At first their coming was hailed as most satisfactory. The Planters' journal said of them in 1888, "These people assume so readily the customs and habits of the country, that there does not exist the same prejudice against them that there is with the Chinese, while as laborers they seem to give as much satisfaction as any others."¹⁴

By 1892 the Japanese were the largest and most aggressive elements of the plantation labor force and the attitude toward them changed. In 1894 the Planters' journal complained: "The tendency to strike and desert, which their well nigh full possession of the labor market fosters, has shown planters the great importance of having a percentage of their laborers of other nationalities. ...They seize on the smallest grievance, of a real or imaginary nature, to revolt and leave work..."¹⁵

Most of the grievances of the Japanese had to do with the quality of the food given to them, the unsanitary housing, and labor treatment. And chief among their grievances, was the inhuman treatment they received at the hands of the luna, the plantation overseers. Such men were almost always of a different nationality from those they supervised. In fact, most were Europeans who did not hesitate to apply the whips they carried constantly with them to enforce company discipline.¹⁶

Many workers began to feel that their conditions were comparable to the conditions of slavery. The plantation management set up rules controlling employees' lives even after working hours. They were not permitted to leave the plantation in the evenings. There were rules as to when they had to be in bed -usually by 8:30 in the evening - no talking was allowed after lights out and so forth.¹⁷

The Japanese immigrants were no strangers to hard, farm labor. But the heavy handed treatment they received from the planters in Hawai'i must have been extreme, for they created their own folk music to express the suffering, the homesickness and the frustration they were forced to live with, in a way unique to their cultural identity. These short lyrics, popularly sung by the women, followed the rhythm of their work and were called *Hole Hole Bushi* after the Hawaiian expression *hole hole* which described the work of stripping dried leaves from the cane stalks, and the Japanese word *fushi* for tune or melody. Their lyrics [[click here](#)] give us an idea of what their lives must have been like.

Before the 19th century had ended there were more than 50 so-called labor disturbances recorded in the newspapers although obviously the total number was much greater.

EARLY STRIKES:

The earliest strike on record was by the Hawaiian laborers on Kōloa Plantation in 1841. Though they were only asking for twenty-five cents a day, with no actual union organization the workers lost this strike just as so many others were destined to suffer in the years ahead.

They followed this up a few years later by asking and obtaining annexation of the islands as a Territory of the United States because they wanted American protection of their economic interests. As the 19th century came to a close, there was very little the working men and women could show for their labors. Plantation field labor averaged \$15. a month for 26 days of work. The average workday was 10 hours for field labor and 12 hours for mill hands.

Even away from the plantations the labor movement was small and weak. As early as 1857 there was a Hawaiian Mechanics Benefit Union which lasted only a few years.

The only Labor union, in the modern sense of the term, that was formed before annexation was

the Typographical Union.

RACIAL UNIONISM: 1900-1934

On June 14, 1900 Hawai'i became a territory of the United States. This had no immediate effect on the workers pay, hours and conditions of employment, except in two respects. The labor contracts became illegal because they violated the U.S. Constitution which prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude. And the Territory became subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act, a racist American law which halted further importation of Chinese laborers.

When the plantation workers heard that their contracts were no longer binding, they walked off the plantations by the thousands in sheer joy and celebration. These were not strikes in the traditional sense. There were no "demands" as such and, within a few days, work on the plantations resumed their normal course. Many of the freed men, however, left the plantations forever. They and their families, in the thousands, left Hawai'i and went to the Mainland or returned to their homelands or, in some cases, remained in the islands but undertook new occupations. Meanwhile, the planters had to turn to new sources of labor. They brought in more Japanese, Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Spanish, Filipinos and other groups.

The year of 1900 found the workers utilizing their new freedom in a rash of strikes. There were no unions as we know them today and so these actions were always temporary combinations or blocs of workers joining together to resolve a particular "hot" issue or to press for some immediate demands. Twenty-five strikes were recorded that year. Most of them were lost, but they had an impact on management. Within a year wages went up by 10 cents a day bringing pay rates to 70 cents a day.

Because most of the strikers had been Japanese, the industrial interests and the local newspapers intensified their attacks upon this racial group. Just as they had slandered the Chinese and the Hawaiian before that they now turned their attention to the Japanese. An article in the Pacific Commercial Advertiser of 1906 complained:

A more obstreperous and unruly lot of Japanese than Waipahu is cursed with, are not to be found in these islands....To discharge every Jap and put in newly-imported laborers of another race would be a most impressive object lesson to the little brown men on all the plantations....So long as they think they have things in their own hands, they will be cocky and unreasonable...18

The employers also continued their "divide and rule" technique as reported by a U.S. Labor Commissioner in 1902 who said,

"...during the year ending June 30, 1901. The regular arrival of monthly expeditions of Puerto Rican laboring people throughout an entire year largely disabused them [the Japanese] of this sense of monopoly and made them much more reasonable in their

relations with their employers."¹⁹

During the first decade of the 20th century more than 40 strikes were reported in the press. Most of the strikes were for higher wages. Some were in protest of harsh treatment. One was a demand for discharge of a luna named Patterson at Waipahu who ran a lottery racket. Such work stoppages were often spontaneous, usually involved only one ethnic group and mostly without any organizational structure to back them up, and with few exceptions, the results were a loss to the workers.

SKILLED TRADE UNIONS:

Meanwhile in the towns, especially Honolulu, a labor movement of sorts was beginning to stir. These were craft unions in the main. They too encountered difficulties and for the same basic reason as the plantation groups. The racist poison instigated by the employers infected the thinking and activities of the workers.

As early as 1901 eleven unions, mostly in the building trades, formed the first labor council called the Honolulu Federation of Trades. Later this group became the White Mechanics and Workmen and in 1903 it became the Central Labor Council affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Similarly the skilled Caucasian workers of Hilo formed a Trade Federation in 1903, and soon Carpenters, Longshoremen, Painters and Teamsters had chartered locals there as well. But these locals tended to die out within 20 years without ever fulfilling the goal of organizing the unorganized, in large part because of their failure to take in Orientals.²⁰

The 1909 STRIKE:

There came a day in 1909 when the racist tactics of the plantation owners finally backfired on them. For years they had been paying workers unequal wages based on ethnic background. The Japanese were getting \$18 a month for 26 days of work while the Portuguese and Puerto Ricans received \$22.50 for the same amount of work.

A young lawyer named Motoyuki Negoro pointed out the injustice of unequal wages in a series of articles he wrote for a Japanese newspaper. This led to the formation of the Zokyu Kisei Kai (Higher Wage Association), the first organization which can rightfully be called a labor union on the plantations.

The leaders, in addition to Negoro were Yasutaro Soga, newspaper editor; Fred Makino, a druggist and Yokichi Tasaka a news reporter. The members were Japanese plantation workers.

The Association initiated a polite request to the Planter's Association asking for a conference and appealing to the planters for "reason and justice." The Planters acknowledged receipt of the letter but never responded to the request for a conference. On the contrary, they made a decision amongst themselves not to deal with the workers representatives and they forbade any individual plantation manager from coming to an agreement with the workers.

The workers waited four months for a response to no avail. Meanwhile they used the press to plead their cause in the hope that public opinion would move the planters. The English language press opposed the workers demands as did a Japanese paper that was pro-management. In

desperation, the workers at 'Aiea Plantation voted to strike on May 8. This was followed within the next two weeks by plantations at Waipahu, Ewa, Kahuku, Waianae, and Waialua. The Waimanalo workers did not walk off their jobs but gave financial aid as did the workers on neighboring islands.

Immediately the power structure of the islands swung into action against the workers. Sixty plantation owners, including those where no strike existed banded together in a united front against labor. Strikebreakers were hired from other ethnic groups, thus using the familiar "divide and rule" technique. The Hawaiian, Chinese and Portuguese were paid \$1.50 a day which was more than double the earnings of the Japanese workers they replaced.

The Newspapers denounced the strikers as "agitators and thugs." An article in the Advertiser referred to the Japanese as, "unskilled' unthinking fellows, mere human implements."²¹ The Japanese Consul was brought in by the employers and told the strikers that if they stayed out they were being disloyal to the Japanese Emperor. But this had no impact upon them.

On June 7th, 1909 the companies evicted the workers from their homes in Kahuku, 'Ewa and Waialua with only 24 hours notice. The people picked up their few belongings and families by the hundreds, by the thousands, began the trek into Honolulu. Yes, even from Kahuku 600 marched along the coast and over the Pali to Palama. It took them two days. There, and in Kaka'ako and Moili'ili, makeshift housing was established where 5,000 adults and many children lived, slept and were fed. But this too failed to break the strike.

On June 8th, police rounded up Waipahu strikers who were staying with friends and forced them at gunpoint to return to work. Thirty of their friends, non-strikers, were arrested, charged with "inciting unrest." On June 10, the four leaders of the strike, Negoro, Makino, Soga and Tasaka were arrested and charged with conspiracy to obstruct the operation of the plantations. On June 11th, the chief of police banned all public speeches for the duration of the strike. In a cat and mouse game, the authorities released the strike leaders on bond then re-arrested them within a few days. The documents of the defense were seized at the office of the Japanese newspaper which supported the strike. In the trial of the leaders, which began on July 26th, the only evidence against them was the Japanese newspaper articles and these were translated in such a way as to twist the words and give them a more violent meaning.

In the midst of the trial there was an attempted assassination of the editor of an anti-strike Japanese newspaper. It had no relation to the men on trial but it whipped up public feeling against them and against the strike.

On August 5, 1909, after three months out, the strike was called off. On the record, the strike is listed as a loss. It cost the Japanese community \$40,000 to maintain the walkout. The Higher Wage Association was wrecked. But the strike was well organized, well led and well disciplined, and shortly after the walkout the employers granted increases to the workers who were on "Contract", that is working a specified area on an arrangement similar to sharecropping. This was estimated at \$500,000. The ordinary workers got pay raises of approximately \$270,000. Housing conditions were improved. The racial differential in pay was gradually closed.

As for the owner, the strike had cost them \$2 million according to the estimate of strike leader Negoro. The four strike leaders were found guilty and sentenced to fines and 10 months

imprisonment. But when the strike was over public pressure mounted for their release and they were pardoned by Secretary of the Territory, Earnest Mott-Smith. In 1973, Fred Makino, was recommended posthumously by the newswriters of Hawai'i for the Hawaii Newspaper Hall of Fame.

In the years following the 1909 strike, the employers did two things to ward off future stoppages. They imported large numbers of laborers from the Philippines and they embarked on a paternalistic program to keep the workers happy, building schools, churches, playgrounds, recreation halls and houses. Though they did many good things, they did not pay the workers a decent living wage, or recognize their right to a voice in their own destiny.

Two years after the strike a Department of Immigration report said, "The sugar growers have not entirely recovered from the scare given them by the strike.... and would like to bring in to the islands large numbers of Filipinos or other cheap labor to create a surplus, so that..... they would be able to procure the necessary help without being obliged to pay any increase in wages."

A Commissioner of Labor Statistics said, "Plantations view laborers primarily as instrument of production. Their business interests require cheap, not too intelligent, docile, unmarried men."

THE BIG FIVE:

In 1911, the American writer, Ray Stannard Baker, said, "I have rarely visited any place where there was as much charity and as little democracy as in Hawaii."²²

The decade after 1909 was a dark one for Labor. There were no major strikes although 41 labor disturbances are on record in this period. These were not just of plantation labor. They involved longshoremen, quarry workers, construction workers, iron workers, pineapple cannery employees, fishermen, freight handlers, telephone operators, machinists and others. Wages were the main issue but the right to organize, shorter hours of work, freedom from discrimination, and protests against unfair discharge were matters that triggered the disputes.

The employers had continued to organize their efforts to control Hawai'i's economy, such that before long there were five big companies in command. The notorious "Big Five" were formed, in the main, by the early haole missionary families at first as sugar plantations then, as they diversified, as Hawai'i's power elite in all phases of island business from banking to tourism. They were C. Brewer, Castle & Cooke, Alexander and Baldwin, Theo. Davies, and Hackfeld & Co., which later became AmFac.

The first notable instance of racial solidarity among the workers was in a 1916 dispute when longshoremen of all races joined in a strike for union recognition, a closed shop, and higher wages. This strike was led by Jack Edwardson, Port Agent of the Sailors Union of the Pacific. The workers did not win their demands for union security but did get a substantial increase in pay. These were the years of World War I. War-induced inflation raised the cost of living in Hawai'i by 115%. Yet the plantation owners were so strong that basic wages remained unchanged.

THE 1920 STRIKE:

In 1917 the Japanese formed a new Higher Wage Association. They reminded the Hawaii Sugar Planters' Association that the established wage of \$20 to \$24 a month was not enough to pay for the

barest necessities of life. The planters ignored the request. Instead, they stepped up their anti-Japanese propaganda and imported more Filipino laborers.

Because a war was on, the plantation workers did not press their demands. But when hostilities ended they formed a new organization called the Federation of Japanese Labor and began organizing on all islands.

Meanwhile the Filipinos formed a parallel but independent Filipino Labor Union under the leadership of Pablo Manlapit. The two organizations established contact. However they worked independently of each other. Eventually this proved to be a fatal flaw.

In December of 1919 the Japanese Federation politely submitted their requests. The appeal read in part:

We are laborers working in the sugar plantations of Hawaii. People know Hawaii as the paradise of the Pacific and as a sugar producing country. But do they know that there are thousands of laborers who are suffering under the heat of the equatorial sun, in field and in factory, and who are weeping with 10 hours of hard labor and with a scanty pay of 77 cents a day?

We love production. Fifty years ago, when we first came to Hawaii, these islands were covered with ohia forests, guava fields and areas of wild grass. Day and night did we work, cutting trees and burning grass, clearing lands and cultivating fields until we made the plantations what they are today.

We are faithful laborers willing to follow the steps of our departed elders and do our part toward Hawai'i's production. We hear that there are in Hawaii over a hundred millionaires, men chiefly connected with the sugar plantations. It is not our purpose to complain and envy, but we would like to state that there are on the sugar plantations which produced these large fortunes for their owners a large number of laborers who are suffering under a wage of 77 cents a day.

The effects of the European war have reached Hawaii and there is no need to mention about the spiraling rising living costs. We have so far restrained ourselves because we did not want to cause the slightest disruption in the economy of our nation at war. The war is over, and our plight has increased. The sugar industry has prospered. The elimination of wartime taxes, combined with postwar lower freight and fertilizer have resulted in increased profits to the industry. We fully realize that capital is entitled to a fair return. On the other hand, we feel that it would only be fair and just that worker's economic plight be recognized and consideration be given to increasing their wages.²³

Their respectful request was accompanied by a list of demands which included:

1. An increase from 77 cents to \$1.25 a day. Women laborers to receive a minimum of 95 cents a day.
2. The bonus system to be made a legal obligation rather than a matter of benevolence.

3. An eight hour day
4. Maternity leave with pay for women two weeks before and six weeks after childbirth.
5. Double-time for overtime, Sundays and holidays.

The HSPA flatly rejected all items. Three times the workers submitted proposals. Three times they were rejected. The workers sent two representatives to meet with the HSPA. The HSPA would not even grant them an interview. As the Japanese Federation was considering what steps to take next, the Filipino Laborer's Association jumped the gun and went on strike on January 19, 1920.

Four days later the Japanese joined them in the strike. The response of the HSPA followed the pattern of action it had used in 1909. With the Advertiser and the Star-Bulletin as their mouthpiece they attacked the strike as an Oriental conspiracy, always describing the strikers as "alien agitators."

At the same time, the press was giving considerably kinder treatment to a Teamster strike of primarily white and Hawaiian drivers against Honolulu Construction and Draying, Co. But, as on the plantations, the employers were steadfastly refusing to recognize or bargain with their employees in any form whatsoever.

The main attack of the press, however, was directed against the Japanese. The *Star-Bulletin*, in an editorial tried to intimidate Americans who supported the strikers. The editorial said, "An American citizen who advocates anything less than resistance to the bitter end against the arrogant ambition of the Japanese agitators is a traitor to his own people."²⁴

The next step of the owners was to evict the strikers from plantation homes. They did not spare the sick, the elderly and the children. When the police had finished, over 12,000 were homeless. Again the long treks into town began.

As one of the strike leaders recalled later, "... the 18th of February is a day we can never forget. It was the day when we were expelled from our homes on the plantation.... A pitiable and even frightful scene that day (was) presented to us --household utensils and furniture thrown out and heaped before our houses, doors tightly nailed that none might enter, sickly fathers with trunks and baggage, mothers with weeping babes in arms, the crying of children, and the rough voices of the plantation officers.... Alas, poor wanderers, where were we to find ourselves at the next break of day?"²⁵

An influenza epidemic was raging at the time, and sickness and death hit the ranks of the workers and their families. Still, this did not break the strike. On the contrary, the inhuman treatment that was suffered forged an even greater solidarity. Less fortunately, bitter feelings generated in this strike were planted deep in the heart of the Japanese community.

In the midst of the struggle, a disagreement developed between Pablo Manlapit, leader of the Filipinos, and the leaders of the Japanese Federation. The *Star-Bulletin* and *Advertiser* goaded and humiliated the Filipinos by continually writing that they were only being used by the Japanese.

Manlapit announced that all Filipinos were returning to work, and the *Star-Bulletin* immediately gloated that the strike had been broken. Though there was confusion in the ranks, many Filipinos refused to follow Manlapit's instruction. Instead, they stuck with their Japanese brothers and sisters.

Five days later Pablo Manlapit revoked his call for an end to the strike. He said he had misjudged the mood of his people.

The employers tried to take advantage of the situation. Reports were spread that Manlapit had been offered a bribe of \$25,000 but had held out for \$50,000. The rumors were never substantiated.

The strike began to weaken and wind down. On July 1, 1920, more than five months after it began, the Federation voted to call off the strike. Many Japanese were never taken back to work. As was common in such cases, the names of union leaders were "black-listed" to prevent them from working anywhere.

But, as with most struggles of the workers, there were some positive results. Shortly after the strike, the race differential in wages and in the bonus system were eliminated. Pay was increased from \$20 up to \$23 a month. The bonus was increased. Management made extensive improvements in housing, sanitation and water systems.

The strike had developed some qualities of leadership among the workers which would be useful 15 and 20 years later when there was a resurgence of unionization. The Japanese Federation had received \$681,499 in strike assessments and in support from the community. This was 16 times as much as had been given in the 1909 strike.

The HSPA, according to some estimates, had spent \$12 million as compared to \$2 million which was used to break the earlier strike.

1924 -THE FILIPINO STRIKE & HANAPĒPĒ MASSACRE:

Typically, the bosses now became disillusioned with both Japanese and Filipino workers. They spent the next few years trying to get the U.S. Congress to relax the Chinese Exclusion Act so that they could bring in new Chinese. Suddenly, the Chinese, whom they had reviled several generations back, were considered a desirable element. Congress, in a period when racism was more open than today, prevented the importation of Chinese labor.

Unfortunately, organized labor on the mainland was also infected with racism and supported the Congress in this action. For a while it looked as though militant unionism on the plantations was dead. To ensure the complete subjugation of Labor, the Territorial Legislature passed laws against "criminal syndicalism, anarchistic publications and picketing."²⁶

This repression with penalties up to 10 years in prison did not stifle the discontent of the workers. Particularly the Filipinos, who were rapidly becoming the dominant plantation labor force, had deep seated grievances. As the latest immigrants they were the most discriminated against, and held in the most contempt.

Although the planters claimed there was a labor shortage and they were actively recruiting from the Philippines, they screened out and turned back any arrivals that could read or write. They wanted only illiterates. Of 600 men who had arrived in the islands voluntarily, they sent back 100. But these measures did not prevent discontent from spreading.

In 1922 Pablo Manlapit was again active among them and had organized a new Filipino Higher Wage Movement which claimed 13,000 members. In April 1924 a strike was called on the island of Kaua'i. The chief demands were for \$2 a day in wages and reduction of the workday to 8 hours. It

looked like history was repeating itself. The employers used repression, armed forces, the National Guard, and strikebreakers who were paid a higher wage than the strikers demanded. Again workers were turned out of their homes. The propaganda machine whipped up race hatred. Spying and infiltration of the strikers ranks was acknowledged by Jack Butler, executive head of the HSPA.²⁷

Arrests of strike leaders was used to destroy the workers solidarity. People were bribed to testify against them. On September 9th, 1924 outraged strikers seized two scabs at Hanalei, Kaua'i and prevented them from going to work. The police, armed with clubs and guns came to the "rescue."²⁸ The Filipino strikers used home made weapons and knives to defend themselves.

The Associated Press flashed the story of what followed across the nation in the following words: Honolulu. - Twenty persons dead, unnumbered injured lying in hospital, officers under orders to shoot strikers as they approached, distracted widows with children tracking from jails to hospitals and morgues in search of missing strikers - this was the aftermath of a clash between cane strikers and workers on the McBryde plantation, Tuesday at Hanalei, island of Kaua'i. The dead included sixteen Filipinos and four policemen.

In the aftermath 101 Filipinos were arrested. 76 were brought to trial and 60 were given four year jail sentences. Pablo Manlapit was charged with subornation of perjury and was sentenced to two to ten years in prison. The *Hawaii Hochi* charged that he had been railroaded to prison, a victim of framed up evidence, perjured testimony, racial prejudice and class hatred. Shortly thereafter he was paroled on condition that he leave the Territory.²⁹

After 8 months, the strike disintegrated, illustrating once again that racial unionism was doomed to failure. And what of the sugar companies? The Federationist, the official publication of the AFL, reported: In 1924, the ten leading sugar companies listed on the Stock Exchange paid dividends averaging 17 per cent. From 1913 to 1923 eleven leading sugar companies paid cash dividends of 172.45 percent and in addition most of them issued large stock dividends.³⁰

After the 1924 strike, the labor movement in Hawai'i dwindled but it never died. Discontent among the workers seethed but seldom surfaced. Pablo Manlapit, who was imprisoned and then exiled returned to the islands in 1932 and started a new organization, this time hoping to include other ethnic groups. But the time was not ripe in the depression years. There were small nuisance strikes in 1933 that made no headway and involved mostly Filipinos. In 1935 Manlapit was arrested and forced to leave for the Philippines, ending his colorful but tragic career in the local labor movement.

VIBORA LUVIMINDA:

The mantle of his leadership was taken over by Antonio Fagel who organized the *Vibora Luviminda* on the island of Maui.

The *Vibora Luviminda* conducted the last strike of an ethnic nature in the islands in 1937. Fagel and nine other strike leaders were arrested, charged with kidnapping a worker. Fagel spent four months in jail while the strike continued. Eventually, *Vibora Luviminda* made its point and the workers won a 15% increase in wages. But there was no written contract signed. The loosely organized *Vibora Luviminda* withered away. The era of workers divided by ethnic groups was thus

ended forever.

The years of the 1930s were the years of a world wide economic depression. Unemployment estimated at up to 25 million in the United States, brought with it wide-spread hunger and breadlines. Hawai'i too was affected and for a while union organization appeared to come to a standstill.

PA'A HUI UNIONS: TRIUMPHS OF SOLIDARITY³¹

After 1935

The third period is the modern period and marks the emergence of true labor unions into Hawaiian labor relations. Labor throughout the entire United States came to new life as a result of President Roosevelt's "New Deal". Under the protection of a landmark federal law known as the Wagner Act, unions now had a federally protected right to organize and employers had a new federally enforceable duty to bargain in good faith with freely elected union representatives. In this new period it was no longer necessary to resort to the strike to gain recognition for the union. Under the Wagner Act the union could petition for investigation and certification as the sole and exclusive bargaining representative of the employees.

Two big maritime strikes on the Pacific coast in the '30's; that of 1934, a 90 day strike, and that of 1936, a 98 day strike tested the will of the government and the newly established National Labor Relations Board to back up these worker rights. The strike of 1934 in particular finally established the right of a bona fide union to exist on the waterfront, and the lesson wasn't lost on their Hawaiian brothers.

By terms of the award, joint hiring halls were set up, with a union designated dispatcher was in charge, ending forever the humiliating and corrupt "shape up" hiring that had plagued the industry.

The West Coast victories inspired and sowed the seed of a new unionism in Hawai'i. Harry Kamoku, a Hilo resident, was one of those Longshoremen from Hawai'i who was on the West Coast in '34 and saw how this could work in Hawai'i. He and other longshoremen of Honolulu, Hilo and other ports took up the job of organization and struggle to achieve recognition of their union, improved conditions, and greater security through a written contract. This new era for labor in Hawai'i, it is said, arose at the water's edge and at the farthest reach from the power center of the Big 5 in Honolulu.

On Kaua'i and in Hilo, the Longshoremen were building a labor movement based on family and community organizing and multi-ethnic solidarity. Harry Kamoku was the model union leader. Part Chinese and Hawaiian himself, he welcomed everyone into the union as "brothers under the skin."

Inter-Island Steamship Strike & The Hilo Massacre

The Inter-Island Steamship Navigation Co. had since 1925 been controlled by Matson Navigation and Castle & Cooke. In the days before commercial airline, nearly all passenger and light freight transport between the Hawaiian islands was operated by the Inter-Island Steamship Co. fleet of 4 ships. By 1938 a rare coalition of the Inland Boatmen's Union (CIO) and the Metal Trades Council (AFL) in Honolulu had signed up the 500 Inter-Island crewmen and were trying to

negotiate contracts. On May 26 a strike was called and after three weeks the company began to recruit replacements to get the ships running again and break the unions.

Workers in Hilo and on Kauaʻi were much better organized thanks to the Longshoremen so that when Inter-Island was eventually able to get the *SS. Waialeale* back into service at the end of July, sympathetic unionists there were prepared to demonstrate their support for the striking workers. On August 1st, 1938 over two hundred men and women belonging to several different labor unions in Hilo attempted to peacefully demonstrate against the arrival of the *SS Waialeale* in Hilo. They were met by a force of over seventy police officers who tear gassed, hosed and finally fired their riot guns into the crowd, hospitalizing fifty of the demonstrators. In that bloody confrontation 50 union members were shot, and though none died, many were so severely maimed and wounded that it has come to be known in the annals of Hawaiian labor history as the Hilo Massacre.³³

On June 12, 1941, the first written contract on the waterfront was achieved by the ILWU, the future of labor organizing appeared bright until December and the bombing of Pearl Harbor through the territory into a state of martial law for the next four years.

The bombs that dropped on Pearl Harbor also temporarily bombed out the hopes of the unions. Martial law was declared in the Territory and union organization on the plantations was brought to a sudden halt. Military rule for labor meant:

1. Wages were frozen at the December 7 level.
2. Workers were forbidden to change jobs without permission from the employer.
3. Unemployed workers had to accept jobs as directed by the military.
4. Absenteeism was punishable by fines up to \$200 or imprisonment up to two months. Under this rule hundreds of workers were fined or jailed. In some instances workers were ordered to buy bonds in lieu of fines or to give blood to the blood bank in exchange for a cut in jail time.
5. Labor contracts were suspended.²⁸
6. Plantations and the military worked out an arrangement whereby the army could borrow workers. The workers received 41 cents an hour but the Planters were paid 62 cents for each worker they loaned out. All told, the Planters collected about \$6 million dollars for workers and equipment loaned out in this way. taken.

The 1946 Sugar Strike

As to the plantations, still no union had been successful in obtaining so much as a toe-hold in any plantation of the Territory until 1939. There were many barriers. Anti-labor laws constituted a constant threat to union organizers. Strangers, and especially those suspected of being or known to be union men, were kept under close surveillance. Camp policemen watched their movements and ordered them to leave company property. The Anti-Trespass Law, passed after the 1924 strike and another law provided that any police officer in any seaport or town could arrest, without warrant, any person when the officer has a reasonable suspicion that such person intends to commit an offense. These provisions were often used to put union leaders out of circulation in times of tension and industrial conflict.

Thirty-four sugar plantations once thrived in Hawaiʻi. "King Sugar" was a massive labor-

intensive enterprise that depended heavily on cheap, imported labor from around the world. While the plantation owners reaped fabulous wealth from the \$160 million annual sugar and pineapple crop, workers earned 24 cents an hour. With the War over, the ILWU began a concerted campaign to win representation of sugar workers using the new labor laws. From 1944 to 1946 membership rose from 900 to 28,000 as one by one plantation after plantation voted overwhelmingly for the union.

The plantation owners could see a strike was coming and arranged to bring in over 6000 replacements from the Philippines whom they hoped would scab against the largely Japanese workforce. But the ILWU had organizers from the Marine Cooks and Stewards union on board the ships signing up the Filipinos who were warmly received into the union as soon as they arrived.

About twenty six thousand sugar workers and their families, 76 thousand people in all, began the 79-day strike on September 1, 1946 and completely shut down 33 of the 34 sugar plantations in the islands. By actively fighting racial and ethnic discrimination and by recruiting leaders from each group, the ILWU united sugarworkers like never before. Members were kept informed and involved through a democratic union structure that reached into every plantation gang and plantation camp. Every member had a job to do, whether it was walking the picket line, gathering food, growing vegetables, cooking for the communal soup kitchens, printing news bulletins, or working on any of a dozen strike committees. The organization that won that strike for the union remained long after the strike and became the basis of a political order that brought about a political revolution by 1954.

The agreement ending the strike abolished the perquisite system on sugar plantations and provided for the conversion of perquisites into cash payments, an estimated \$10,500,000 in increased wages and benefits. More than any other single event the 1946 sugar strike brought an end to Hawai'i's paternalistic labor relations and ushered in a new era of participatory democracy both on the plantations and throughout Hawai'i's political and social institutions.

The Great Dock Strike of 1949

The 1949 longshore strike was a pivotal event in the development of the ILWU in Hawai'i and also in the development of labor unity necessary for a modern labor movement. The 171 day strike challenged the colonial wage pattern whereby Hawai'i workers received significantly lower pay than their West Coast counterparts even though they were working for the same company and doing the same work.

The employers included all seven of the Territory's stevedoring companies with about 2,000 dockworkers total, who were at the time making \$1.40 an hour compared to the \$1.82 being paid to their West Coast counterparts. After trying federal mediation, the ILWU proposed submission of the issues to arbitration. When that was refused by the companies, the strike began on May 1, 1949, and shipping to and from the islands came to a virtual standstill.

The local press, especially the Honolulu Advertiser, vilified the Union and its leadership as communists controlled by the Soviet Union. This vicious "red-baiting" was unrelenting and stirred public sentiment against the strikers, but the Union held firm, and the employers steadfastly rejected the principle of parity and the submission of the dispute to arbitration.

The Legislature convened in special session on August 6 to pass dock seizure laws and on August 10, the Governor seized Castle & Cooke Terminals and McCabe, Hamilton and Renny, the

two largest companies, but the Union continued to picket and protested their contempt citations in court.

From the beginning the Union had agreed to work Army, Navy and relief ships at pre-strike wages. A "splinter fleet" of smaller companies who had made agreements with the Union were also able to load and unload, which as time passed became an effective way for the union to split the ranks of management.

The strike was finally settled with a wage increase that brought the dock workers closer to but not equal to the West Coast standard, but it was certain the employers were in disarray and had to capitulate.

One year after the so-called "Communist conspiracy" trials, the newly won political rights of the working people asserted itself in a dramatic way. Union contracts protected workers from reprisals due to political activity. And so in 1954 Labor campaigned openly and won a landslide for union endorsed candidates for the Territorial Legislature.

The newly elected legislators were mostly Democrats. Many were returned World War II veterans whose parents had been plantation laborers. They reflected the needs of working people and of the common man. Thus the iron grip of the industrial oligarchy, which had controlled Hawaiian politics for over a half century through the Republican Party, was broken.

In the years that followed the Labor Movement was able to win through legislative action, many benefits and protections for its membership and for working people generally: Pre-Paid Health Care, Temporary Disability Insurance, Prevailing Wage laws, improved minimum wage rates, consumer protection, and no-fault insurance to name only a few.

Labor was also influential in getting improved schools, colleges, public services and various health and welfare agencies.

In the meantime the Labor Movement has continued to grow. Late in the 1950's the tourist industry began to pick up steam. The advent of statehood in 1959 and the introduction of the giant jet airplanes accelerated the growth of the visitor industry. At the same time that mechanization was cutting down on employment on the plantations, the hotel and restaurant business was growing by leaps and bounds.

The Unity House unions, under the leadership of Arthur Rutledge, which covered hotel and restaurant workers plus teamsters, reached a growth in 1973 of about 12,000 members.

Forging Ahead

Early struggles for wage parity were also aimed at attempts to separate neighbor island wage standards from those of Honolulu City & County. A permanent result of these struggles can be seen in the way that local unions in Hawai'i are all state-wide rather than city or county based. For example, Local 745 of the Carpenter's Union in Hawai'i is the largest in the International Brotherhood of Carpenters.

In 1961 President John F. Kennedy issued an Executive Order which recognized the right of Federal workers to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining. This gave a great impetus to an already growing union movement among Federal employees. In 1973 it was estimated that of 30,000 Federal workers in Hawaii, about one third are organized, mostly in AFL-CIO Unions. Of

these, the Postal Workers are the largest group. In 1966 the Hawai'i Locals of the AFL-CIO joined together in a State Federation. [see [Pa'a Hui Unions](#)] In 1973 the Federation included 43 local unions with a total membership in excess of 50,000.

The ILWU lost membership on the plantations as machines took the place of man and as some agricultural operations, were closed down but this loss was offset by organizing other fields such as automotive repair shops and the hotel industry, especially on the neighbor islands. In 1973 it remained the largest single trade union local with a membership of approximately 24,000.

By 1968 unions were so thoroughly accepted as a part of the Hawaiian scene that it created no furor when unions in the public sector of the economy asked that the right of collective bargaining by public employees be written into the State Constitution.

The Constitutional Convention of 1968 recommended and the voters approved a section which reads:

Persons in public employment shall have the right to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining as prescribed by law.

In pursuance of this constitutional mandate, the State Legislature in 1970 adopted a Public Employee Collective Bargaining Law which gave workers in the State and county government the right to organize and bargain collectively, including the right to strike under certain conditions.

Thus Hawai'i became one of the first states in the Union to recognize that government workers had the right to strike similar to that of workers in private industry.

Labor had indeed come a long way from the dark days when workers were looked upon as mere instruments of production and unions were considered evil conspiracies; when work was paid at subsistence levels and living conditions were mean and demeaning; when education for working class children was primitive and security in old age was unheard of.

In 1973 union membership embraced about 115,000 members out of a work force of 350,000.

And so the struggle goes on, usually more peaceful than in previous decades, but the union campaign for better wages, hours and conditions of employment continues. And, as in the past, the union fight embraces demands for greater democracy, economic, political and social.

The Labor Movement in serving its own members inevitably contributes to the welfare and prosperity of the community; to the quality of life itself.

NOTES

* This essay is based in major part on a television script by Max Roffman written for the series [Rice & Roses](#), produced by the Center for Labor Education & Research in 1974.

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