

While the Hawaiian Islands are beautiful, housing conditions for many are poor.

Hawaii: Prison or paradise for oppressed people?

By Dan Kiyomura

The situation of national and class struggle in the Hawaiian Islands has presented a complex problem of analysis for Marxist-Leninists. In just a few hundred years, the territory has undergone transitions from primitive Asiatic society to feudal society to bourgeois society—all of which were hastened by the intervention of several colonialist and imperialist powers and vast in-migrations of non-native peoples. Today, no single nationality makes up a majority of the peoples in Hawaii and the native Hawaiian people themselves are one of the smaller minorities.

The significance of these objective conditions and their history is the subject of the following article, which is based on the text of a speech delivered at the recent nationalities conference of the CPML. The speech was given by a leading member of the Communist League of Hawaii, and he points out that it is only meant as an introduction to this subject. In the period following the conference, the CLH achieved fundamental unity with the CPML and the two organizations have merged.

I was asked to give a presentation to the nationalities conference on the national question in Hawaii. My talk will be brief and not go into depth on every question. Marxist-Leninists need to do a much

more thorough analysis of this question, especially in view of the many changes that have taken place in recent years.

What kind of ideas do you have about the Hawaiian Islands? The bourgeoisie, of course, spreads the myth of the exotic, brown-skinned Polynesian beauties swaying under the coconut trees, while the Pacific surf rolls up on the sandy beaches and tropical tradewinds waft through the evening air.

Hawaii's people are beautiful, and the Hawaiian Islands are beautiful, too. But imperialism is ugly. Contrary to the lies of the bourgeoisie, Hawaii is no "island paradise" for the working people and minority nationalities. In fact, if Hawaii was an "island paradise," there would be no revolutionary struggles there, no Marxist-Leninists, and I would not be here today.

NATIONALITIES IN HAWAII

First, some facts about the question. The Hawaiian Islands are a chain of 124 or so islands and atolls, including eight major islands. These are located at about the center of the Pacific Ocean, midway between Asia and the U.S. mainland. Hawaii's population is genuinely multinational, with no single nationality constituting a majority.

About 40% of the population is "Haole," the term used to refer to people of Anglo-Saxon background. While the vast majority of these today are military families, working people or professionals, a small group of capitalist "Haoles" have historically dominated the economy of the Islands.

The Japanese are the second largest nationality, constituting about 30% of the population. While they have suffered discrimination and exploitation in the past on the plantations, today most of the Japanese have become skilled workers and white-collar workers. A handful of Japanese have found a place in the circles of monopoly capital and have taken center stage in state and city electoral politics.

Today Filipino people make up about 15% of the population. This is largely due to a recent wave of immigration. Immigrant Filipinos now occupy the most oppressed sectors of the working class, i.e., in the service, pineapple and sugar industries. There are also significant numbers of Portuguese, Chinese and Puerto Ricans, whose parents or grandparents came during the boom of the "plantation period" around the turn of the century. Today, there are also growing numbers of immigrants from Korea and Samoa.

Finally there is the native Hawaiian people. But to get a better grasp of their situation, I would like to describe the objective conditions of Hawaii a little more.

Hawaii's major industries are tourism, the federal government

bureaucracy and military, and the sugar and pineapple industry. Just as in the rest of the U.S., the impact of the crisis is keenly felt in Hawaii. In addition, some wage levels are lower and the cost of living higher in Honolulu than in most cities on the U.S. mainland. Still, industrialized Hawaii must not be confused with the typical colonial situation. Contradictions are not so intense as in the outright U.S. colony of Puerto Rico.

Hawaii is particularly important to the U.S. monopoly capitalists because of its military significance. In the early 1930s, for instance, Comintern official Sen Katayama noted: "Though the territory is small, nevertheless the Hawaiian Islands form the most important strategic point in the Pacific Ocean."¹ Today, there are more than a dozen major bases and over 100,000 military personnel and their dependents in the Islands. The U.S. military controls 30% of the land on the major island of Oahu, and Hawaii remains a key component of the U.S. military presence in this vast region.

The Soviet social-imperialists are also a growing presence in Southeast Asia. Given their recent attempts to penetrate the newly-liberated Pacific island nations and the growing war danger, the



Native Hawaiians are struggling to stop U.S. use of Kahoolawe Island as a military target. (Photo by Edward Greevy.)

military significance of the Hawaiian Islands has come to the forefront again for the U.S. imperialists. When this is combined with the fact that Hawaii is the only state with a majority "nonwhite" population and a history of colonialism, then it is evident why the Hawaiian national question and the revolutionary struggle there has become an important question for U.S. Marxist-Leninists.

Now I would like to give you a brief history of the Hawaiian Islands and the native Hawaiian people. I should point out that in the Islands, we simply refer to them as "Hawaiians," while mainlanders tend to call anyone from the Islands a "Hawaiian," regardless of nationality.

The Hawaiians are only a minority of the present population of Hawaii, constituting somewhere between 10% and 20% of the total. It is difficult to get a good idea of the exact percentage for two reasons. First, the census taken by the bourgeoisie is notoriously inaccurate in its treatment of minorities. Second, the Hawaiians have freely intermarried with other nationalities, and these with others, and so



Anti-eviction movement is a focus of the struggle in Hawaii. Here demonstrators picket landlord's house. (Call photo)

on. Thus "pure" Hawaiians are a small group even among the Hawaiian people, and those who stem from intermarriages are recorded differently in different surveys.

Most Hawaiians today are an important part of the multinational working class. Only a small minority continue to maintain their fishing and farming traditions. About 70% of the Hawaiian people live in the city of Honolulu, residing in working class neighborhoods and housing communities. Some live in the Papakolea and other homestead areas, which were set aside by a congressional act earlier this century for persons of Hawaiian blood.² The rest of the Hawaiian people are concentrated in rural communities such as Waianae and isolated valleys on neighboring islands.

The Hawaiian people have been subject to imperialist oppression for almost 200 years. National oppression, racism and discrimination is evident in the following figures:

CONDITIONS FACED BY HAWAIIANS

- The median income for a Hawaiian family is \$2,000 per year less than that of the state's population in general.
- Only 10% of Hawaiians occupy professional and managerial positions in the labor force, as opposed to 18% of non-Hawaiians.
- Some 34% of Hawaiians live in public housing projects.
- Hawaiians are 27% of the welfare recipients.
- Hawaiians are 50% of prison and jail inmates and 53% of those incarcerated for juvenile delinquency.
- Hawaiians are only 3% of enrolled university students. Of 48 high schools with a 20% Hawaiian student body, 40 have been termed "underachieving schools."

The list could go on and on. The Hawaiian people today are clearly an oppressed minority nationality in the Hawaiian Islands.

This situation has a long history. When Captain Cook first came to the Islands in 1778, he found a flourishing Polynesian society of several hundred thousand people.³ Their economy was based on the irrigated cultivation of the taro plant, the construction of fish ponds and other relatively developed agricultural methods. While much of the rest of Polynesia was still in the stage of primitive communalism, in Hawaii a primitive class society had already developed by the time of Cook's arrival. Shortly after Cook's opening of the Islands to the West, Kamehameha the Great, a Hawaiian chief, made use of advanced weapons acquired through trade to arm the people and smash the strength of the old Asiatic society. The Islands were then united under a feudal monarchy.

Capitalism emerged in Hawaii in the early 1800s, with the sandalwood and whaling trade developing as an important part of

the economy. The local "alii" or chiefs were eager to obtain the luxury goods offered by the Yankee and English traders and thus ruthlessly exploited the "makaainana" or common people through corvée labor⁴ and taxes. This impoverishment, combined with the spread of Western diseases, disrupted the traditional paternalistic and self-sufficient mode of production and caused a sharp decline in the living conditions of the Hawaiian people.

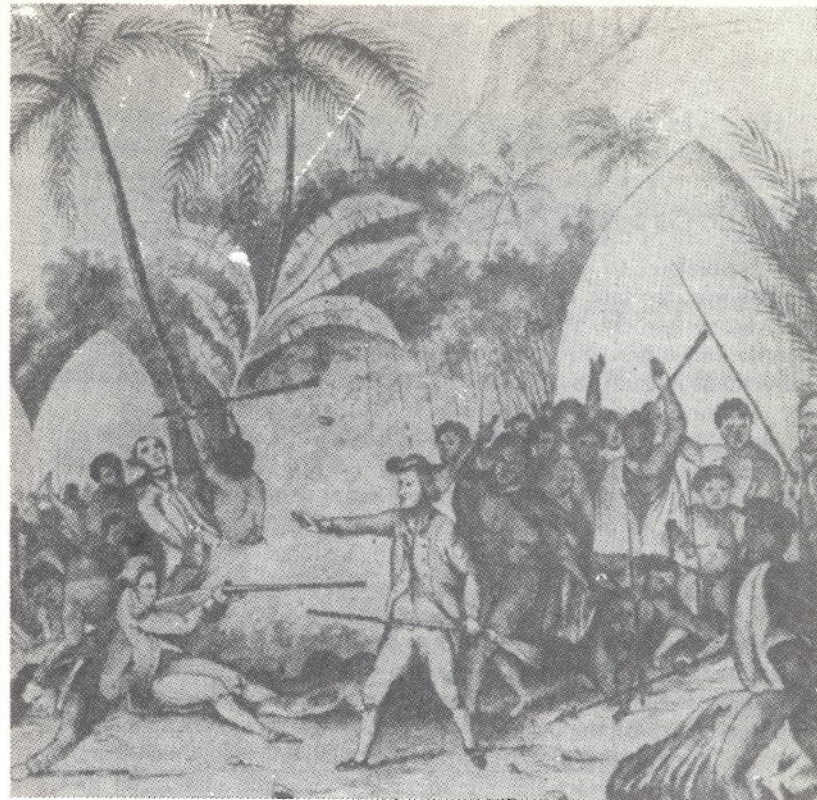
A handful of chiefs, of course, became capitalist entrepreneurs themselves. But the most successful merchants were a few American, English and German trading firms, which came to thoroughly penetrate and dominate the Hawaiian economy. This neatly dovetailed with the ideological penetration of Hawaiian society by the American missionaries who, under the guise of spreading the word of God, actually taught the Hawaiians to be ashamed of their culture and uprooted their heritage.

GROWTH OF SUGAR PLANTATIONS

With the depletion of the sandalwood forests and the whaling grounds, the American and other capitalists in Hawaii turned to sugar production. In turn, the new sugar plantations soon came under the control of the handful of American, English and German trading firms which had formed in the earlier period and had served as bankers for the plantations. These consolidated sugar producers became known as the "Big Five" after the turn of the century. Naturally, their growing economic power demanded greater political influence. The growth of the plantations was also accompanied by a significant import of capital from San Francisco and the West Coast of the U.S. mainland and the growing influence of West Coast sugar boss Claus Spreckels in Hawaii.

Step by step, the political power of the Hawaiian monarchs was wrested away from them by the American and English businessmen in the Islands, who were backed by the military force of U.S and British warships. Other European powers such as Germany and France also used "gunboat diplomacy" against the Hawaiian Kingdom. In 1848 the King was pressured into declaring the "Great Mahele," which established private property in land and laid the groundwork for the rapid acquisition of land by foreigners. In 1887, the "Bayonet Constitution" was forced upon the King by an armed gang of Americans and Englishmen. This sharply cut back his powers in favor of a council of Haole "advisors" and "secretaries."

In 1893 Queen Liliuokalani decided to annul the "Bayonet Constitution." As a result, she was overthrown by a clique of sugar planters with the aid of the U.S. Marines. Robert Wilikoki Wilcox and other Hawaiian bourgeois-democrats who had earlier opposed



Captain Cook (center) in the battle which took his life.

the monarchy in favor of a democratic republic recognized where their interest lay and defended the Queen and their national rights. The Haole capitalists abolished native civil laws, proclaimed martial law, and established their own "Republic of Hawaii." An armed uprising of Hawaiians followed in 1895, but it was suppressed and the national movement of the Hawaiian people ebbed.

1898 was a landmark year for U.S. imperialism. Through the Spanish-American war, the U.S. seized the Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii and other Pacific islands. At that time, the Hawaiian people already constituted less than 35% of the population.⁵ The ruling 7% were Haoles and the rest of the people were immigrant plantation laborers from China, Portugal, Japan and elsewhere. This influx of plantation immigrants and the power of the sugar oligarchy made the Hawaiian people "strangers in their own land." As a result, we can read very little about the conditions or movements of the Hawaiian people during this period in our history books, although we do know that they participated actively in the labor struggles of the 1930s and 1940s.

Hawaii became a state in 1959, as a result of the joint efforts of mainland monopoly capital, the new Asian capitalists and the labor movement which had come under the control of the bureaucrats. Nonetheless the national sentiment of the Hawaiian people made itself evident at this point, as they were the only significant sector of the population to oppose statehood in the referendum. In fact, throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Hawaiian national sentiment resurfaced fiercely, spurred on by the struggle of the Vietnamese people and other third world countries and by the Black liberation movement in the U.S. The mass struggle for land in Kalama Valley, for instance, was a rallying point for this reawakening.⁶

Today the Hawaiian people are fighting for land, reparations and the teaching of their own language and culture. All progressive people in Hawaii cannot deny the impact of this struggle. Just as the Black revolt of the 1960s was a "clarion call" for the American people, the rebirth of the Hawaiian national movement was a "clarion call" for the people of Hawaii to stand up against U.S. monopoly capital.

What view will communists take towards the Hawaiian national question? Can we afford to ignore it as did the old CPUSA in Hawaii? No! We have seen this where this lack of theoretical and practical work on the national question leads. It is part and parcel of the whole revisionist ideological and political line which led the party in Hawaii to support the Democratic Party and statehood lock-stock-and-barrel. This line leads to the all-round liquidation of communist work, as we have seen in Hawaii and in the mainland U.S.

We must actively take up the national question, study the real facts of the situation, and work to unite the working class and the oppressed nationalities in the heat of class and national struggle. To do so, we must support the just demands of the Hawaiian people for land and political power, along with the struggles of other progressive national movements in the Islands. In this struggle, we will have to unite the communists and unite the masses. Although our task may be difficult, our choice is clear.

IMUA KAKOU. (Forward Together!)

1. Sen Katayama, "Hawaii, the Strategic Knot of the Pacific," *Communist International*, June 22, 1933.

2. Although there is a very long list of persons with Hawaiian blood waiting for these lands, many of the homestead lands have been used for other purposes by government officials. Hilo Airport, the site of a recent demonstration by native Hawaiians (see "51 Hawaiians Arrested in Protest," *The Call*, September 25, 1978), lies on Hawaiian Homes land, which has been misused by the state.

3. See "The True Story of Captain Cook in Hawaii," *The Call*, January 16, 1978.

4. Corvée labor is tax levied upon the peasant or commoner in the form of "days of work for the Lord."

5. The Hawaiian population decreased in absolute numbers from about 300,000 in 1778, to about 40,000 in 1896.

6. Kalama Valley was the site of a struggle by Hawaiian and other local residents against eviction by the Bishop Estate. The Bishop Estate was set up under the will of Bernie Pauahi Bishop to benefit the Hawaiian people, but has been entirely controlled from the beginning by a group of Haole businessmen on the board of directors. Although the residents were forcibly evicted to make way for \$100,000 homes for the rich in May 1971, the Kalama Valley struggle gave rise to the revolutionary nationalist organization, Kokua Hawaii, and sparked the growing Hawaiian nationalist movement.