

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Tadao Beppu

Tadao Beppu was born March 26, 1919 in Kihei, Maui. In 1936 he came to O'ahu to go to the University of Hawai'i. After graduating from the university in 1940, he worked as a stevedore on the Honolulu waterfront.

When World War II started, he went to work for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and in 1943 he joined the U.S. Army and served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He was wounded in the war and spent a year in a French hospital.

On a G.I. bill, he studied at Northwestern University School of Business in Chicago. After returning to Hawai'i, he became active in the Democratic party and eventually worked as an administrative assistant to Daniel Inouye, who was at that time (1957) the territorial house majority leader.

His own political career began when he was elected to the territorial house in 1958 and continued to serve through 1974. He was the state house speaker from 1967 till his defeat in 1974. He served as the chairman of the statehood committee, and he was the first committeeman of the Young Democrats Club of Hawai'i.

He was appointed deputy director of the state Department of Health three years after he left the house. He retired from that position in 1980.

Tadao Beppu died in 1993.

Tape No. 17-10-1-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Tadao Beppu (TB)

April 15, 1988

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Chris Conybeare (CC) and Daniel W. Tuttle, Jr. (DT)

Joy Chong: The following is an interview with Tadao Beppu. It took place on April 15, 1988 at KHET studio. The interviewers are Chris Conybeare and Dan Tuttle.

CC: Okay, it's April 15. This is part of our continuing series of oral history interviews with people from Hawai'i's political history, and we're with Mr. Tadao Beppu today.

We'll start the way we have with everybody. If you could just give us a little bit about your early background, where were you born, and what were your parents doing at that time? What was life like when you first came on the scene?

TB: I was born on Kīhei, Maui [March 26, 1918]. I went to public schools there. Well, those [were] the only public schools we had anyway, maybe one private school. And my father [Teizo Beppu, who immigrated to Hawai'i from Fukuoka, Japan] worked in a boiler room or in a power plant for the HC&S Company [Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company]. And he worked there till he retired in about 19—mid '50s, I think it was.

CC: How about your mom [Tora Beppu]? Did she work too?

TB: No, she was just a housewife, took care the family. And that's about her life.

CC: Big family or . . .

TB: No, not too big. Small family. In those days, you had lot of illness among little kids or babies, and so we ended up [a] kind of small family. So I had one brother and one sister living with me.

CC: And Maui was pretty much country in those days, huh?

TB: Yes. I went to [a] two-classroom [school] in Kīhei, Maui. Because my father moved from one plant [plantation] to the other, I went to one, two, three elementary schools, one intermediate school and one high school. And so when I had my own children, I decided to live near a school so my kids don't have to walk for a mile or mile and a half.

CC: And as a kid growing up on that plantation environment, did you have to work too or. . .

- TB: Well, I worked, not necessarily on the plantation, but at various phases, I worked in the alfalfa field which was run by a dairy. I worked in the cane field, I worked in the pineapple cannery. And as I grew up older, later on, I worked as a stevedore in the Honolulu waterfront.
- CC: How about high school? Did you get involved in any activities that would sort of point the way towards a political career or were you . . .
- TB: No, not exactly. My interests [were] more in sports. And I may have belonged to very few clubs, that's about it.
- DT: You must have played baseball, didn't you?
- TB: When I was in high school [Maui High School], we didn't have a baseball team.
- DT: Oh, you didn't?
- TB: No, but I played in a team for the area that I lived [in]. And when I came to university [University of Hawai'i], I played on [the] university baseball team. That's about it.
- CC: So was [Ichiro] "Iron" [Maehara] playing over in those days when you were . . .
- TB: Iron already was a—it was the height of his career. Great baseball player. And after I left, he retired, but he was still playing when I was there.
- CC: You ended up over here, at some point. How did you get over to O'ahu? What brought you over from Maui?
- TB: I came by boat, of course.
- (Laughter)
- CC: You didn't walk, huh?
- TB: I tell you the story because I remember when James Michener [author of *Hawai'i*] was here, and one day I told him, "Say, since you're going around with the horse set, how about meeting some of the people in the plantations?"
- He said, "Okay, good idea."
- So we took him down to Hale'iwa area, Waialua, had a good beach picnic, bonfire, and with people from that plantation area. And I noticed Jim had a good conversation with them, and he was trying to build his [book] character. So he asked one of—he asked Koji Ariyoshi [publisher of the *Honolulu Record*] this question. "I have this guy [character in Michener's work] from Kaua'i, he comes to Honolulu and becomes a labor leader. How did he come?"
- He [Ariyoshi] said, "By boat, of course."

(Laughter)

- CC: What motivated you to get on the boat when you came over? Was it work or . . .
- TB: No, I just wanted to go to the University of Hawai'i. Those days we pay about five bucks go on steerage and come to Honolulu. That's the only transportation we had.
- DT: This must have been about 1936 that you came over to UH?
- TB: Yeah, '36. From that year.
- DT: And you ultimately graduated, did you not . . .
- TB: Yes, I did [in 1940].
- DT: . . . from university? What did you specialize in or major in?
- TB: Business and economics.
- DT: But not so much in the government field?
- TB: No, not much. I was interested in maybe the sociology, anthropology, but not in the political science area necessarily.
- DT: Well, you didn't have much of a political science or government department those days. I guess Paul Bachman was probably teaching about the only courses that they had then. [Bachman was University of Hawai'i president between 1955 and 1957.]
- TB: No, we had William George, political science. [George was once dean of the University of Hawai'i College of Arts & Sciences.]
- DT: Oh, yes. Yeah, right.
- TB: Bachman was history.
- DT: George, that's right.
- CC: When did you graduate? What year did you . . .
- TB: Nineteen forty.
- CC: Nineteen forty.
- DT: Then you went immediately to Chicago, did you?
- TB: No. I started working on the [Honolulu] waterfront. Then the war [World War II] broke out. But we used to have a deferment. Well, I would say the first, maybe four or five drafts. We had deferments if you had a job that's related to defense or war effort. And because I was working on the waterfront, I was getting deferment. Then about 1942, I hate to admit this, but I've been told that we got fired. The five of us got fired because we were meeting with people like Jack Kawano from the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]. He was trying to organize the waterfront. [See also *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* and

Advertiser, 2/27/66. In this article, TB claims he was fired from his waterfront job because of his Japanese ancestry, not because of the ILWU's organizing of the waterfront.] We were the clerks. And so from there, I went to work for the United States Engineers [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers], warehousing area, and I stayed there until 1943, when I volunteered for the [U.S.] Army. And then I was in the army for three years. Came back, then on the GI Bill, I went to Chicago [Northwestern University, School of Business] to do some work there. That's my life.

DT: Well, during the war, you went—you joined the 442nd [Infantry Regimental Combat Team], right?

TB: Yes.

DT: And you were in Italy and France.

TB: I was in Italy, France and England. I got wounded in France, so I spent a year in the hospitals in France, England and the [U.S.] Mainland. And I ended up with crutches. I got a bad injury in my leg.

DT: Well, you had several decorations, as I recall too, from your wartime experiences.

TB: Nothing big, but I did receive a bronze star, a soldier's medal, and a purple heart, among others.

CC: Sounds pretty impressive to me.

DT: And you talked much politics in those days with the fellows? About what you would do when you got back to Hawai'i or did that enter in?

TB: Not too much time for politics, but we did see a lot of things that we [had] never seen. After all, we trained in [Camp Shelby] Mississippi for one year. And I remember the commanding officer saying, "Look, you guys [are] going [to] be here only about a year at the most, so don't try to change the social structure in the South." And so, we were neither fish nor fowl there, you know, so we were confused where to sit in the buses or sit in the waiting room.

DT: Were you one of those that got acquainted with Earl Finch back in those days?

TB: Yes, I did meet Earl there, and if you got time for it, I'll tell you a story.

DT: Oh, sure.

TB: I asked Earl, "How did you get started with the fellows?"

He said, well, this is right after Dunkirk. He had a bunch of British sailors and soldiers who were in the Gulf of [Mexico]. They were resting [i.e., rest and recreation]. So Earl said he used to go down there, take the pool tables, etcetera, sometimes shows, rodeos, to entertain the British soldiers and sailors. And he said the town people used to tell him, "Why do you do this? These are foreigners."

He said, "Well, these guys are fighting the war just like we are."

And then we [Japanese Americans] came in. So he turned the attention to us. So he had the same reaction, “What the hell you doing with these guys?” You know.

CC: But apparently, he did befriend you and a lot of other fellows, right?

TB: Yes. He used to invite the boys to rodeo shows. He used to have picnics. He was not a very rich man. And I know that toward the end of the war, and after the war, he introduced a lot of his friends who were in the show business area, especially Broadway and movies, to entertain our boys. So he used to tell me that—I think his name was Ed Sobol from New York entertainment area, that he [would] tell him, “Eh, Ed. We need help.” And he would help. He did talk to people like Frank Sinatra. And a character named Cal Humphries from the Chicago southside, he was one of those kingpins down in those days, and they would help him. And they were always interested in how Earl got involved, what’s his interest.

DT: But he later moved to Hawai‘i, didn’t he?

TB: Yes, he did. He came here about 1946, I think it was. And they had one of the biggest parades I’ve ever seen here. A colorful parade, had a big banquet for him, because the boys never forgot what he did for them.

DT: I know there was strong feelings about this, and pretty good vibes, shall we say.

CC: I was looking through the old newspaper clippings, and I guess while you were convalescing from your wound, you ended up with a famous drinking buddy, was Red Skelton or something like that, didn’t you?

TB: Oh, Red Skelton was not my drinking buddy, but he was in the same convalescent hospital with me. And (when I) used to go to PX [post exchange] and drink beer, (Red Skelton) [would] be there sitting down with a whole bunch of guys listening to stories. And I noticed a few months later, I see him signing about a million-dollar contract for radio. Those days, radio was a big thing.

DT: (Chuckles) Right.

CC: Did you come back [to Hawai‘i] before you went back to the Mainland or. . . .

TB: Yeah, I got back. I was back here.

DT: Back here for a while and went on to graduate studies in Chicago [Northwestern University, School of Business].

TB: Mm hmm.

DT: And had you gotten involved in politics in Hawai‘i before you moved to Chicago, or did you get involved in politics in Chicago?

TB: No, I was not involved here. Oh, I guess the closest thing that I would say involving, would be that I had experience over the social problems. Like [Lawrence] Fuchs who wrote *Hawai‘i Pono*, one of the first questions he asked me was, “When did you notice English Standard schools? How old were you?”

And then I start thinking about those things, then he asked me if I saw any kind of social discrimination in Hawai'i.

I said, "Yes."

"Like what?" he said.

"Well, like dual standard wages [pay scale based on ethnicity]." It was a common thing then. And I guess I only was interested in some of the social problems we had here.

But in Chicago, I did participate in politics there in the old forty-second ward which is near northside. And one of the congressman that I helped support is Sidney [R.] Yates [Democratic congressman from Illinois, 1948–62, 1964–]. He's still in Congress. And he's been there almost forty years, except a two-year term that he was out when he ran for U.S. Senate against Everett [M.] Dirksen [in 1962]. But what killed Yates's chances was the Bay of Pigs [invasion]. Well, [President John] Kennedy was supposed to come to Chicago, campaign for Yates, but because of Bay of Pigs, he had to fly back, call all his leaders, including Dirksen. And that kind of helped change the tide as far as Yates was concerned.

DT: Obviously you got involved with the Democrats. Was there ever any question in your mind that you would be a Democrat or . . .

TB: No question. Since I was able to vote here, I identified myself as a Democrat, and voting for Democrats. So when I was in Chicago, same thing, just jumped in there. In fact, I was helping my precinct captain. And he always want[ed] me to help him. He used to ask me what some of the problems [were], and I'd give him the problems. He said, "Write it out." So he can give [it] to some of his cohorts. In fact when Sid Yates ran for Congress, the first thing he said to me was, "I'm Sid Yates. I'm a Democrat. I'm Jewish. And I think I know some of the problems that you guys are facing, so I need your help." And from then, he and I became good friends. And one of the things I told him was, I said, "You know over here, some of these kids are dying. And when they die, they can't even be buried in Chicago." And he was surprised. Unless you belonged to an organization that had cemeteries, they couldn't get buried. In one case, a Japanese kid died. He couldn't get buried. So his brother took his ashes to Los Angeles. So he's buried there. And I noticed right after he [Yates] got elected, the first month in office, he blasted the practices in Chicago on the floor of the Congress.

CC: Because of racial discrimination that they wouldn't allow it or what? Was it . . .

TB: That could be one of it.

CC: But you got right in at the precinct level, political level.

TB: Yes, I was right in there. In fact, 1948, my battalion commander, [Col.] Sherwood Dixon, became the lieutenant governor of the state [Illinois] with Adlai Stevenson. And so I got to be involved with Stevenson's campaign—Dixon's campaign and Paul Douglas' campaign. I think that was the first year he ran for the U.S. Senate [1948], from being a councilman—no, what you call that? [Alderman.]

DT: So when you came back from Chicago, you had all this new political experience with you.

TB: Yes, I had earlier.

DT: When did you come back from Chicago?

TB: I came back in '53.

DT: Fifty-three. I see. That's why you hadn't been in on the early, sort of, you missed all of these fights the Democrats had in the conventions of '48 and '50.

TB: Yeah, I missed that one. But when I came back, I went right into a fight with Tom Gill.

(Laughter)

CC: Oh, tell us about that.

TB: For the [O'ahu Democratic] County Committee chairmanship [in 1954].

DT: Yeah, that was jumping in pretty rapidly, wasn't it?

TB: Yeah, I just got back and they had the candidates for county chairman—what was his name, now? McKinney?

DT: Al McKinney?

TB: Albert, huh?

DT: Albert [J. McKinney] from UH, then?

TB: Yeah. He was at the University of Hawai'i. And he was in trouble with the authorities here, so he pulled out. So they asked me to run. I said, "Look, I just got back here."

They said, "Never mind. Run."

So we had election at the old Stevenson Intermediate School, which is near the academy [Honolulu Academy of Arts]. The county committee . . .

DT: Yeah, Linekona, I guess, yeah.

TB: But Tom and I became good friends after that. (Chuckles)

DT: You mean out of that—that was a very hot meeting in two senses of the word. The weather was very warm that night when you had the elections, I recall. And the meeting heated up because there were a lot of emotions involved, too, because that place was jammed packed. People were sitting in the windows and all that. I'd like to get into that a little bit as soon as we change tape.

TB: Okay, all right.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

- JC: The following is tape number two of the Tadao Beppu interview.
- DT: All right Mr. Speaker, we were talking about the meeting down at old Stevenson School, Linekona School on the night you and Tom Gill squared off, when he was elected [Democratic] county [committee] chairman of O‘ahu [in 1954]. And that was a rather bitter battle, as I recall. You recall on how close it was and some of the events of the evening?
- TB: Oh, I don’t recall too much because I wasn’t directly involved in trying to run up the votes, etcetera. I was just put up at the last minute because the original candidate they had had to pull out. And so I was interested in the outcome. That’s it.
- CC: Was there anything at that time that started this, you know, the idea that there were the factions? I mean, Tom Gill ended up for a long time being identified with a certain group of people, and likewise, people identified with, say, Jack Burns or others. Was that your first introduction to that whole situation, or what was going on? I mean, why did they want you to run against Tom?
- TB: They didn’t have any candidate left then. I guess the other guys were too experienced to understand, that maybe they could count votes. And so (at the) last minute, they asked me to run. I said, “Okay, you guys got nobody, I’ll run. I’ll go.” That’s it.
- DT: Who recruited you, Jack Burns himself or . . .
- TB: No, it wasn’t Jack. Geez, I forget. There are a bunch of guys.
- DT: [Mike] Tokunaga or [Dan] Aoki or . . .
- TB: I think those guys were involved, too.
- CC: Am I correct? Did you actually join Jack Burns for a time in the real estate business? Was that the same time or . . .
- TB: Yes, just about because we elected Jack for delegate to Congress in 1956 from our office on Nu‘uanu Avenue. We were on the second floor, and there was another fellow across the hall from us, Robert Oda. And now between the two offices, we elected Jack Burns. In fact the night of the election, some people didn’t know where the headquarters was. So we had to make sure that people—we were outside, and make sure that they knew [it] was the second floor where Jack’s office was or campaign headquarters was. And we worked on a low budget. And that’s when [1956] I think Jack beat Betty Farrington by 19,000 [15,000] votes. Two years before that [1954], he had lost by 800 [890] votes.
- DT: So during this period when you would run unsuccessfully for O‘ahu [Democratic] County [Committee] chairman, just back from the Mainland, you were in business with Jack in real estate for about three or four years?
- TB: Yeah, I was in that office. We would use his office, and that building was owned by Takaichi Miyamoto. He was one of the old-time Democrats and we used to have a lot of fun with him because we used to argue with him, fight with him. He owned the building, and then we would argue with him because we didn’t agree with some of his thinking as far as the direction of the Democratic party.

DT: So I don't think Jack Burns really sold much real estate during that period of time. He was playing politics most of the time . . .

TB: No, he hardly sold because he's too busy running around.

DT: So that left you to sell more real estate.

TB: No, we didn't sell too much.

(Laughter)

CC: Both of you didn't. (Chuckles)

TB: There were other people involved in that real estate, but.

DT: But then, as I recall, you became quite active, along with Patsy Mink in the Young Democrats, didn't you?

TB: Yes, 1957 we started the Young Democrats [i.e., Young Democratic Club] of Hawai'i. Patsy was the chair and I was the national committeeman. And that's how we started the Young Democrats.

DT: Well, you had known Patsy for some years, had you?

TB: I didn't know her too well, though.

DT: You got acquainted with her right after you came back from the Mainland.

TB: Yeah, yeah.

DT: You hadn't known her . . .

TB: No, I didn't know her.

DT: . . . before she went back to law school, right?

TB: No, I didn't know her then.

DT: But you did become increasingly active in the Democratic party, as such, because I think by 1956 or so, you were a member of the [Democratic] Central Committee, weren't you?

TB: Yeah, I was in [the Democratic] Central Committee and I stayed there about twelve years. I served as secretary and the vice-chairman in those years. And I enjoyed those days in the [Democratic] Central Committee.

DT: And by that time, you got to liking politics so much you decided to run for office, didn't you, about '58?

TB: Yeah, in 1958, they had a big redistricting for the house and senate. And in my [sixteenth] district which ran from Diamond Head to Pālolo, we needed four candidates for the

[Territorial] House of Representatives. And so I ran, one of the four, with Walter [M.] Heen, Spark [M.] Matsunaga, and Hiroshi Kato, four of us. That was my old district, from Diamond Head to Pālolo. And it's interesting to note that, I guess either '58 or—I guess in '58, they had this plebiscite, too, for statehood for Hawai'i. And I had in my district, the highest votes for statehood and the lowest votes against statehood. I think Pālolo, one district, one precinct, I had about three votes against statehood from a precinct of about 800 people, 800 voters. And in Diamond Head precinct, the vote was about 22 or 24 percent against statehood.

DT: Really? Who were the people that were voting against it? What was their . . .

TB: Well, the people living there [Diamond Head] were the Dillinghams. And so I had extremes in my district.

DT: Interesting. So essentially, a *Haole* group that was against statehood at that time.

TB: Yes, they were old standby Republicans who had controlled Hawai'i, and I guess for them, it was more convenient to [be] a territory where they can call up or run up to Washington D.C. so they can have a governor selected [i.e., appointed], the judges selected, and some of the other members of the territorial government, I think, which was just more convenient for them.

DT: Then, before you turned around, you just barely gotten settled into office, you were confronted with the first—one of the earlier coalitions. Certainly it was the first time the Democrats had taken the initiative in forming a coalition. This sort of put you on the spot right from the very outset, didn't it?

TB: Yeah, and we came under fire right away. That was 1959 session. We got elected in '58, so we were in the last territorial session, the thirtieth territorial session [which convened from February 18, 1959 to May 2, 1959]. Then we got statehood, so in 1959, we had to run for office again. And we had a statehood session, first statehood [which convened from August 31, 1959 to October 22, 1959]. So there were quite a number of us who were in the last territorial session and the first state [special session].

DT: That again involved Tom Gill, didn't it? And Vince Esposito [O. Vincent Esposito] on one hand, and Elmer Cravalho on the other.

TB: Yeah. See, Vince was speaker in 1957 session. Then he got elected in '58. Oh, those days were biannual sessions. [Until statehood, the legislature met biannually, i.e., every two years. After statehood, the legislature was biennial—running every two years and meeting every year.]

DT: Right, I was going to mention.

TB: So Vince was running for reelection again, and this time, Elmer Cravalho got in as speaker. [O. Vincent Esposito was speaker of the house, 1957–59. Elmer F. Cravalho was speaker from 1959–67.]

DT: Which faction did you end up in, those days?

TB: You know, Dave McClung and I were caught in the middle because we were trying to resolve this, but we couldn't. So he and I said, the heck with this one here. We thought that maybe the Vince Esposito faction was kind of extreme in trying to exclude some members, and same time, we didn't really believe in the other side, what they were doing. So Dave and I kind of sat this one out.

DT: So you really found yourself caught in the middle, but in final analysis, I guess you had to vote one way or another, didn't you?

TB: Oh, by then the Republicans jumped in, so the coalition started.

CC: Was there a strong feeling amongst those of you who were good solid Democrats about the Republicans, or was that an easy choice for—was it a tough choice for people to make?

TB: I think for some of us, it was kind of tough choice, because of the nature of the coalition.

DT: But you continued on and managed to get reelected for many, many more times, didn't you? Your party activity, of course, continued. I think you went to several Democratic national conventions.

TB: Yes, I did go to 1960, '68, '72, '76 and '80. I was supposed to go '64, in Atlantic City, but we had a special session, so I didn't go to that one.

CC: Who would you support in the 1960 one, your Chicago background?

TB: Well, originally I wanted Adlai Stevenson.

DT: And that was settled on the first ballot, so [John] Kennedy walked away with it. (Chuckles)

TB: That's right.

DT: The Hawai'i delegation, I think, had one-and-a-half votes for Kennedy, right, and the rest of you were either split between Lyndon Johnson or . . .

TB: Yeah, Johnson, I think [Stuart] Symington had one. Stevenson had maybe three or four.

DT: But you were really sort of on a different side there with Jack Burns for a while, weren't you, because Burns was pushing for Lyndon Johnson, and you were Stevenson.

TB: Yeah. Jack was for Johnson, then a few of us for Stevenson, and I think Kennedy had one vote, I think.

CC: And little bit later on, jumping ahead a little bit, I noted that in 1966, you ended up supporting Tom Gill, didn't you, as opposed to Kenny Brown [Kenneth F. Brown].

TB: Yes, I did, for lieutenant governor. And I remember Jack Burns asking, "How come?"

I said, "Look. I don't know Kenny Brown. I never met the guy." Years later I had told Jack, "If I had known Kenny Brown, maybe it would have been different." Because after I served with him in the (legislature), I mean, when he was a senator, I found Kenny Brown to be one

of the better senators, better legislators, actually. He was solid, steady, I like him. And he and I are good friends now.

CC: But in those days, you really didn't know him.

TB: No, I didn't know. I never met the guy, you know.

DT: Well, you always sort of prided yourself, didn't you, in being a good Democrat, but also did your level best to keep from getting involved in the factional quarrels of the party. Is that your intent?

TB: No, I don't think that was intent. I just end up that way. When I thought when this was a better route to take, I would take that route. Or if I believed in voting for something that I think was right, I would vote for it. Jack Burns as a governor—one nice trait about him. If you're one of the few guys who voted against a bill, he would call you up and say, "Hey, I see you vote against it. How come?"

I recall couple of bills that I voted against. I was one of the few, maybe one or two guys in the house, and he called me, "How come you voted against?"

And I'd explain my position. I noticed he vetoed the bill. I don't think it was because of me, but I guess I gave enough reason for him to understand my position. One I recall was a postponement of lease rentals or permits for public projects like concessions at the airport, concessions at the parks, and where there's a major renovation or improvement being made. And I recall at that time, this new gull wings were being installed. So there was a major construction going on. So we had a bill to postpone or reduce the lease payments. I was one of the few that voted against it, and I gave Jack the reason why. For instance, he had voted, he had put in a bid for a concession, and I put in a bid for a concession. But it wasn't fair for the guy who bid for it to say now that [because] there's a major construction going on, he should cut his lease rental to 50 percent or 40 percent, whatever it was. I felt that anyone that's bidding for a project, should have known that coming up, 'cause it's public knowledge that major improvement going be made at Ala Moana Park, and I noticed he vetoed that.

CC: So evidently, he got over the fact that you supported Tom Gill when he was trying to promote Kenny Brown. In other words, even though you didn't go along with him on that, why, you felt you enjoyed a good relationship afterwards?

TB: Yes, I think so. My relation, over the years with Jack, was always cordial. Of course, he and I disagreed on many things. I recall disagreeing with him on, I don't know whether it was his bill or a bill that came from the national guard. A bill that said that the governor will go in the compact with other states to send our national guard for civil disturbance. And I remember my chairman coming up to me saying, "What are you going to do if [there] was a killing?"

I told him, "Well, I'm not going to send our national guardsmen to California to break up the grape boycott there, or to Alabama for the civil disturbance there." I said, "I'm not going to do that."

And so we killed the bill. And it was during the election, somebody brought it up about sending the national guardsmen, and the guy was wrong because we never passed that bill.

And I recall during the height of the Vietnam War, he had a speech on either Veterans' Day, Armed Forces Day, in regards to the Vietnam War. And Jack made a statement that if we had pulled out of Vietnam, that the United States [would] be accused of racial discrimination, that we didn't care about the Southeast Asians there, compared to maybe, the Europeans. So I told Jack, "You know, I disagree with you on discrimination." I said, "Okay, let's go around to a small country like, in Europe, like Albania or Yugoslavia. Let's bomb the hell out of them." I said, "I don't think the American people would stand for it." Well, he didn't argue with me, but I think I made a point with him on that one.

DT: You very rapidly rose to leadership. You were vice-speaker from '64 to '67, right? So within about six years of entering the house, why, you had a leadership responsibility.

TB: Actually in a little over eight years I became speaker, I think.

DT: So that was in about '67 or . . .

TB: Sixty-seven.

DT: Sixty-seven.

TB: Right after the session, Elmer Cravalho resigns, so I took over in '67.

DT: All righty, well, we'll pick that up with your tenure of speakership right after we change tapes again. (Chuckles)

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: This is tape number three for the Tadao Beppu interview.

CC: You had said, when we had talked before about your deciding to back Tom Gill over Kenny Brown, you said you didn't know Kenny Brown. How did you know Jack Burns? When did you first meet him? Was it right after you came back, or did you know him already, before?

TB: I had known him before when he was, I guess, trying to build a Democratic party. But he wasn't that active then.

CC: Now when was this? Right after the war, now? This was . . .

TB: I think before the war. I guess because of his work with the intelligence unit [i.e., Emergency Service Committee], I think it was.

CC: So you actually ran across him back early on?

TB: Oh yes.

CC: And at that time even, it seems he always had an interest in politics. Did he talk about those things with you even back then? Do you remember?

TB: Not too much then. He was more interested in the war effort here. Then he was interested in baseball, Hawai'i league baseball here. In fact, I think he managed the athletics baseball team

here, during the war.

DT: But had you participated in his campaign for delegate to Congress in the late '40s? I think it was '48, wasn't it, '46 I guess it was?

TB: I don't think he ran in '46, though.

DT: It was either '46 or '48 [it was 1948]. He ran and really ran a poor race.

TB: They just about threw his name in. But the more serious one started from '54.

DT: Right, right.

TB: When he had lost. Then '56 and '58.

DT: But you were campaigning for him in '54 [for delegate to Congress].

TB: That's right.

DT: Then again in '56, but not in the earlier years.

TB: No.

CC: Well no, I just was curious because it's kind of interesting to see how people meet other people and sometimes, it's not in the political context at all, but like maybe baseball, actually, had something to do with it.

TB: Could be.

CC: Okay, Dan, why don't we. . . .

DT: Well, we had just reached the point where you'd been elected speaker and you continued on as speaker for about seven or eight years, right?

TB: Yeah, till '74.

DT: What stands out in your mind about those years? Those were very busy years, I know, for you.

TB: Well, we had just moved to the new [state] capitol [building], and we had our first session in 1968, in the new capitol. Of course, our offices were still in the throne room and 'Iolani Palace grounds, in the shacks. But our first session was '68 at the new building. And our meetings were not held there because we were about 85 percent completed. And it was cold because we had no carpeting, and the temperature was freezing most of the time. And I used to see some members in the back row of the house wearing top coats. And I used to kid 'em, "Eh, what were you guys doing there?"

He says, "Geez, it's cold." Because they were right under the vent. And they were in top coats.

Of course, one year, we had a streaker that came in the room, I mean the building, and I think I was the only guy that saw him, besides the doorman, because I'm facing the audience, and I saw a commotion at the door. And I saw the doorman grab him. But nobody else saw him because they're all facing the rostrum, and then I'm looking at the streaker, and I ask the doorman, "How was he?"

He say, "You know, it's tough to grab a guy who's naked. It's like grabbing a greased pig."
(Chuckles)

DT: In the substantive sense, what stands out in your mind of those years [1967–74], in terms of bills passed and major accomplishments?

TB: Yes. There were a lot of bills that we passed. I recall Koji Ariyoshi, friend of mine, one day asking me—he was going [to] make a speech at the University of Hawai'i. So he asked me, "What's one of the bills that you would think, outstanding that you guys have worked on?"

I said, "The bill that we knocked out the subversive commission."

He says, "You know, I never thought about that."

I say, "Yes. Now, you going talk to the kids at [the] university, you better mention that." And this was about my first few years in as speaker. We used to call it the no-guts bill because every year they come in, the bill comes back in budget form, and I recall, the thing started with about \$175,000, and every year they would cut it down. Till the last year, I think, was about \$35,000, and then I saw the report. Dave McClung, president of the senate, and I had the first reports. And I'd never discussed it with Dave, because I just finished reading that report, and I was asked for my comments. I say it stunk because I saw names in there who were on the list as subversive members of the community that were not in leadership positions in the unions, etcetera, in 1946, '48; and here, we're in the '60s. And I told Dave, "I'm going to introduce a bill, to knock this commission out." So we introduced a bill and a resolution. The resolution was to shift one of the secretaries from that office to another office, but the bill wiped the subversive commission. And I think, to me, that was one of the easiest bills that I ever pushed. (DT chuckles.) We knocked the commission out [in 1969].

DT: Yeah, it'd been on the books since 1951, and never was really used to that extent, anyway, so.

TB: It was just a big newsmaker every year, because when the report comes out, there's a list of names. I recall names like—some of the names from the ILWU. Some of the guys were never in the Islands, yet they're listed in this report in the '60s already.

DT: One of the things that—after being so long in the legislature—one of the things that really, sort of surprised the community was that you got defeated [for reelection], I guess, in what was it, '74?

TB: Yes.

DT: What'd you do, fail to campaign, get a little bit overconfident? What's your interpretation of that?

TB: Well, I was told by a Republican that [they] were targeting another Democrat, and I got caught in the cracks there, and. . . . Well, maybe I didn't campaign that hard, too. I didn't care for this standing on the side of the street waving signs, because, to me, that was the most asinine thing to do. I didn't care for it. Of course, maybe I should have campaigned harder.

CC: Now before that, you were involved with some of the factional fights amongst the Democrats, right? And there was [Hiroshi] Kato and [Richard] Garcia and Richard Wong were kind of the dissidents. Did those battles weaken your effort in terms of reelection, or do you think it was unrelated, I mean, what was going on there? What were they trying?

TB: Well, I was speaker for eight years, so some of these didn't affect me. Maybe in some areas they did. Those factions come and go, that every year it changes. Depends on how some of the groups supporting them feel about a certain guy or unions or business or the bosses. So it changes from year to year.

CC: There's always somebody who would like to step into your shoes.

TB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

(Laughter)

DT: Well, isn't it fair to say that the composition of your district had changed a great deal over the years from the time you first got into the legislature?

TB: Oh yes, then we had a redistricting which they included Maunalani Heights which I never had before.

DT: Probably had changed maybe over the years. It had been Democratic, but then it changed into more a Republican area.

TB: Mm hmm.

DT: So that probably didn't help much. At any rate, you pretty well retired from politics after that happened, didn't you? Or you went on and served in state government, though, right? [Governor George] Ariyoshi [in 1976] gave you an appointment [as deputy director of the Department of Health].

TB: I served in the state government for three-and-a-half years. I'm pretty active in politics to an extent. I try to help the party. I chaired two O'ahu county conventions in '84 and '86. So I keep myself—my feet still wet.

DT: So you're still active. Are you . . .

TB: I would say yes.

DT: You're still active in the party apparatus.

TB: Party level.

CC: Do you see any big differences between the days when you started out with the party, and

today, in terms of how things are done, or what goes on? Or is politics pretty consistent, and what's changed the most?

TB: Slight population shifts within the districts. Outside of that, I think it's about the same. Maybe some of the legislators don't have the background that—unique backgrounds, I would say, some of my colleagues had. When we wanted to discuss the financing, we always had somebody who was an expert in finance, or we want to talk about land, there was somebody who was interested in land, or somebody with interest in education or higher education, or somebody who was interested or strong in those areas. I recall my position as speaker sitting down with my policy committee, regards to some of the bills that were being introduced. And if you have about eight or nine members, each one, we could spot a bill or smell a bill, where it came from, who's interested and who's introducing it for whom because we've seen those bills come and go for years. And we warned them, the committee chairmen, "Eh, this guy gonna push for this. Watch it." Or, "This bill is no good," and we give 'em the historical background. So I always enjoyed that because you[re] learning, too, with eight different fellows who had various expertise in certain areas. I'm not saying that the fellows now, they don't have it, but—because I haven't seen those guys in operation.

One comment made by a Republican woman. And I'd seen her, too, in the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] organization, PTA conventions. And she was telling me once that she told her friends in the Republican party, "You know the Democrats are all over the damn place, even the PTA." Which was true. Most of the Democrats, my time, we were active in the community, the PTA. Of course, the PTA, we had a very hot issue those days, elected school board, and the Democrats were in there pushing like hell, you know.

DT: Politics is a lot more expensive in more recent years, right, than when it was when you first started.

TB: Yes, because we didn't need that much funds to run for public office, especially running for state house [of representatives]. Now days, I don't know what they cost, but they do spend more money for advertising, maybe television. This, we hardly used, those days.

DT: Just for example, what's the most you've ever spent in your district? Do you recall?

TB: Maybe about \$6,000.

DT: Say, compared to the '50s and '60s and '70s, and \$100,000s that are now spent, why, there's quite a contrast there.

TB: And I hardly had any fund-raising. In fact, I only had two in my sixteen years in office. Not because I wanted—these two were held when I was speaker of the house. And some of my colleagues, even my colleagues didn't have, and they wanted some fund-raisers, so they asked me to put up myself. So I said, "Okay, you guys sell the tickets, you guys keep the money." So had two of them. That's about it.

DT: So the fund-raiser was for you, but you let them keep the money, huh?

TB: Oh yeah. They sold the tickets, they keep the money.

DT: (Chuckles) That's unusual, wasn't it, in itself.

TB: That's because I didn't like fund-raisers.

CC: Yet today, everybody has 'em.

TB: Yeah, they might have two, three times a term.

DT: There's a feeling abroad, that I think it's a nice thing to—maybe you haven't heard it as much, but as long as you were a good Democrat, well, Tadao Beppu was always your friend. And you'd always go out and work for that person, help that person if you possibly could. Is that a fair statement or are they giving you more credit than you're due, or is it wrong? (Chuckles)

TB: I think they're giving me more credit than that.

DT: Why'd you . . . Okay, go ahead.

CC: I was going to say, I heard one, and that's when you and the guys, especially the guys that came back from the war, got into all this, a lot of you traced your roots back to, well, the plantations or fairly humble backgrounds, but today, there's a notion that maybe the elected officials have had it too good, and they don't have that same sense of history that your generation has. Do you feel that maybe there's been a losing touch with the original principles that you felt?

TB: I don't think they're losing touch. I think what—they don't have our background. I recall certain times we'd have complaints about, whether it's me or somebody else, you know, they're getting tired listening to this politician saying that they're sons and daughters of immigrant plantation workers, which is true. You change our name, could be Wong, Yamashiro, Gonzales, whatever, just change your name with same background. And in our times, we had all those guys, but some of those, they don't have that kind of background now.

I recall even in my case, I think, some of the things I did before being in public office, to me, was more important to give me a good sense of projection for the future. But I recall prior to 1946, any person of non-White descent had to go to immigration station, [before going] to the Mainland, to get a passport or proof of citizenship. And it was put on by the carriers, first the steamship, later on it was the airline, that if you didn't have a proof of citizen[ship], you couldn't buy a ticket. Which is true, because what happened was 1946, a group of us had met with a fellow from the Mainland who was an officer in the army here. He was trying to create the American Veterans Committee. And so we sat down with him, I recall maybe Nimitz and Maunakea Streets, one of the offices there. And we told him about one instance, that why should we, as Americans, have to prove our citizenship to travel. He didn't believe us, though. He said once he was in Waikāī, so on the way back, he stopped at the immigration station to see what's going on. He says he saw a big line there, mostly old people. He said, the middle of the line, he saw a Chinese boy, captain, U.S. Army, his wife, and he was carrying a little baby. He was trying to prove his citizenship, prove that he was a citizen, so he could go to the Mainland to study. This was right after the war. He says, "You know, I had tears in my eyes. I didn't believe you guys." So he says, he went straight to Matson to talk to the president there. He says, "Eh, why do you guys do this?"

He said, "Well, we gotta protect our flanks." Because the federal law says, any carrier that

carries an alien to the United States, will pay a fine. And the fine, I think, was about \$100.

He say, "Yeah, why should these guys have to prove themselves?" And that was 1946.

Nineteen forty-seven, I went to the Mainland. So I went to Pan American [World Airways], bought a ticket. Cost me \$229 one-way to San Francisco. The girl ask me, "Are you a citizen?"

I said, "Yes." I was hoping she would ask me for my citizenship [papers], but she didn't ask me.

I got off in San Francisco. Those days, they had, I don't know, customs and immigration. He asked me, "You're a citizen?"

I said, "Yes."

"You have any proof?" I had it someplace on my discharge papers or something, and I couldn't find it. He said, "Okay, go."

Well, these were the kind of things that we fought for, and I think, gave me some kind of a background into what we were fighting for.

I recall in 1946, too, that I was invited to a Navy Day luncheon for the [Honolulu] Chamber of Commerce here. And I was president of the 442 Veterans Club, at that time, so they asked me to come. And I gave them a lame excuse that I can't make it. So one day the executive secretary [of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce] called me, he says, about a week before the event. He said, "Hey, I see you not coming."

I said, "That's right."

"I want to talk to you." So I went down his office, Dillingham building. By the way, he was John [A.] Hamilton, used to be with Imua [an anti-statehood organization].

I says, "Mr. Hamilton, can I join the navy?"

He says, "No."

I said, "Why should I celebrate Navy Day if I can't join the navy? You want me to represent thousands of boys," some of them still in Italy and France, they couldn't join the navy.

He said, "At least you're honest, you're not going to say you'll be in Hilo, or your grandmother going be dead that day."

I said, "This how I feel." So I didn't go. Later on, I get a call from the president this time [Merwin B. Carson]. He didn't know what had transpired between Hamilton and myself.

So he says, "Damn it." I already told him that I not going. I didn't give him the reason why. "Damn it, the guy don't tell me these things." I don't know, maybe he found out later on, but these are the extremes that we went through which was, to me, real profound, you know.

I met a fellow in Chicago, from here. He told my wife one day, "I see your husband going back and forth. How does he go?"

"He just goes down, buy a ticket."

"Is that what he does?"

"Yeah."

So after one trip, I said, "George, you told my wife this?"

He say, "Yeah."

"What happened?"

"Oh," he says, "I ran away from Hawai'i. Because I divorced my wife, I didn't want to give her alimony. So I ran away." But, he says, "Took me one month, to go down the immigration station, get my passport, buy a ticket, and quietly slip into the boat, steerage class." He said, "Now, you don't have to." It wasn't the law.

I talked to [Samuel] "Sad Sam" Ichinose, the promoter.

DT: Mm hmm.

TB: And Sad Sam used to take boxers to the Mainland from the '30s on. That was the fighters. And I said, "Sad Sam, did you go down and get the passport?"

He said, "Yeah." And so he showed me his proof of citizenship. I still got a copy of it.

I said, "Sam, you didn't have to do this."

"What do you mean, didn't have to? They make me do it."

I said, "Yeah. It's the bigwigs here that made you do it. Because they didn't trust you guys. You guys had Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Hawaiians, Puerto Ricans, whatever, you know." That's the kind of fighters he used to take over.

He said, "Son-of-a-gun." But these things, we had to fight for.

CC: Well, the youngsters haven't had the same experience, but they probably, they're . . .

DT: We have to stop here. We're out of tape.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: And the following is tape number four of the Tadao Beppu interview, and this is the last tape for the interview.

DT: You mentioned the 442 and your interest in that club, that you'd been president, and you are a past president of it. And I believe in addition to that, you're actually incorporator and

founder of the 442 vets club, weren't you? And . . .

- TB: Yes, I was one of the founders, incorporators. And one of the guys that picked the original ten honorary members for the club which included Jack Burns, Earl Finch and Jack Kawano. And it was unheard of, those days, to put a labor leader like Jack Kawano on the board, you know.
- CC: And then you've been active ever since, then, haven't you?
- TB: Yes, oh yeah. We have a pretty active club. We just finished our forty-fifth anniversary banquet, and we had Ben [Benjamin J.] Cayetano [first Hawai'i lieutenant governor and governor of Filipino descent] as our speaker, and he gave a very good speech there. He kind of compared his background with ours, being of Filipino descent. His wife was sitting next to my wife, and towards the end she told my wife that Ben was getting emotional because he felt just like we did, you know, when we were young.
- DT: Yeah. He has a tendency to do that, I think, to identify with various groups. Well, if you don't want to talk any more about the 442, I guess, I'll just ask you to quickly react to some names that have been more recently in the news. I don't know, you have any special feeling, mostly the time when you have been out of office, during the Ariyoshi years? You have any special way you'd like to characterize George?
- TB: Ah, George, yes, I've known him since the '50s when he first ran for office [in 1954]. And he's basically a very shy guy, very humble. And he got his heart in the right place. Maybe he's not as dynamic as some other governors we've had, but I had no problem with that fellow. Just like I had no problem with Jack [Burns]. But now, even [John] Waihee, I see no problems with them.
- CC: Yeah, what about Waihee? I was just going to ask you that as a follow-up.
- TB: Mind you, I never served with John, but I followed his career in the constitutional convention and as a member of the state house. I see a bright future for him.
- CC: You follow the constitutional development, I know. I think we failed to mention the fact that you've served as secretary of the con-con back in '68, right?
- TB: That's right. Twenty years ago.
- (Chuckles)
- CC: So no further reactions to Waihee, then?
- TB: No.
- CC: What about the Republicans? You think they're ever going to snap back, or are they forever doomed as a political party?
- TB: Funny you ask me that question. In 1970, I recall, Jack Burns had a cocktail reception for the members of the legislature, and we were all there. I ended up talking to the five new members of the Republican team. They're asking me about how to—how the floor action, the

committee action, whether they should be present on floor or on all votes. And (chuckles) I says, “Why, some of you—you don’t want to vote on fluoridation, abortion, higher taxes?” I says, “You have to vote. In the house, you gotta be there. You see, you just came out of the election saying, ‘[I’m] the greatest, so vote for me,’ and now you kind of chicken out.”

But anyway, one of the Republicans told me this. He says, “You know, I’m going to give the house another 150 years of Democratic control.” He didn’t mention the senate, he just said the house. No, not 150—50 years of control. This is 1970. So we get lot more years, yet.

DT: Lot more years ahead, then. (TB chuckles.) Looks like Hawai‘i’s doomed to either be one party or the other. Fifty years of Republican rule, or fifty years of Democratic rule. Does that seem to be sort of an iron law to you?

TB: No, I think going be more than fifty years of Democratic, though.

DT: Oh, really. (Chuckles) All right, I don’t have anything else, do you, Chris?

CC: Well, there’s one other name that [we] probably can’t ignore in terms of political history. Even though he was a Democrat then, now calls himself a Republican, Frank Fasi. You had some battles with him, I think, when you were speaker, in terms of . . .

TB: No, I didn’t have battles with him. Not necessarily [as] the speaker. I only recall, well, the press wanted—tried to, anyway, tried to create a battlefield from the city administration under Frank Fasi and the legislature. But I told the press, I said, “Look, I’m not going to use the floor of the house as a battleground for this fighting. We’re going to pass laws what we think is right. I don’t care whether Fasi agrees with them or not, we’re going pass ’em or kill the bills.” But I never had problems with him in the legislature, though. Of course, when I was working with the state administration, he made comments about me that I didn’t know anything about health. But I never saw that in print. Because if he had done that, I would have said, “Look, I know just as much [about] health as Rev. John McDonald,” who was his health director, Father McDonald.

DT: (Chuckles) That would have taken care of that.

CC: That would have taken care of that, yeah. Well, okay, I guess . . .

DT: Alrighty, thank you very much . . .

TB: Okay.

DT: . . . for being with us. And thank you.

CC: Appreciate it a lot.

END OF INTERVIEW

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