

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Robert McElrath, 69, retired International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union Regional Director

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Robert McElrath first came to Hawai'i in 1938 as a fireman aboard the Matson vessel Lihue. While working for Inter-Island Steamship Company, he became active in union activities.

In 1947, he became the ILWU territorial representative in charge of all union organizing activities. He also served as the ILWU's territorial information director, editing the union's newspaper and appearing on radio broadcasts relating to the ILWU.

During the 1950s McElrath and other ILWU leaders were suspected to be members of the Communist party. These allegations fueled those congressmen who maintained that Hawai'i's Communist influence would be a detriment to the union.

McElrath in 1969 became ILWU Regional Director, succeeding Jack Hall. He retired in 1977.

Tape No. 12-8-1-85

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert McElrath (RM)

May 9, 1985

St. Louis Heights, O'ahu

BY: Chris Conybeare (CC) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

- CC: When you first arrived on the scene here, it was about 1938 or so, what were conditions like? The plantation conditions here?
- RM: We used to describe it as feudalism. Really, it wasn't. It was a paternalistic society. Conditions weren't as bad as a serf-lord relationship. But management was the boss and expected the employee to know it. And expected complete obedience. Even as to the employee's political activities. It was almost worth your job to become active in any political activity other than the Republican party.
- CC: We hear stories about some of that, and in terms of actually voting and delivering ballots, how did that get carried out from the plantation system?
- RM: The word generally came from Honolulu. From the Big Five agencies. And each manager was expected to deliver his box. In those days the voting booth was called a "box," not the "precinct" as we know it today. It was the plantation box. And each manager was expected to deliver his box. And he worked very hard to do it because it was important to the plantations and the Big Five to control the legislature.
- CC: And that actually meant physically sometimes delivering the votes? They would actually be in charge of it?
- RM: Well, there was no open intimidation, but there was encouragement. And many of the people on the plantations had a great deal of respect for management. I remember the late Takaichi Miyamoto telling me that when he first joined the Democrat party on Maui, that his old Japanese father went to the plantation manager and apologized for his ingrate son becoming active in (chuckles) the Democratic party. The old man took off his hat, bowed properly, and said he was ashamed of that boy.
- CC: Why would a young man go against his father's wishes like that? What was going on at that time that caused. . . .

- RM: Unlike plantation areas in other parts of the world, plantation employees' children went to school here. Something that you must give credit to the sugar industry for. Through the legislature, they saw to it that the children of the plantation workers went to school and they became educated. They could read and write. Their parents could not read and write. Many of them could not even read Japanese, let alone write, in those days. And I think even today, your Japanese papers here had special characters explaining what (chuckles) the other characters meant. It was an education.
- CC: Awareness from education.
- RM: Yes. And of course, people coming in from the Mainland. There were no travel restrictions.
- WN: What, in your opinion, when you first arrived and you saw what was going on in Hawai'i, what needed to be done?
- RM: My first view of labor conditions here was watching the ships being loaded and unloaded. I came on a merchant ship. And I noticed the pace that the stevedores worked at. They worked unlimited hours. It was ukupau. You worked until the job was done. In talking to them, you'd ask them, "Why the hell are you working so hard here?" They'd say they got a job and they want to keep it, it's a good job. And stevedoring was considered the best job in those days in Hawai'i. Many of them, especially on the outside islands, worked for the plantation. And then, when the ship came in, they worked on the ship. It was called steamer hana, steamer day. They had two wage scales. When they worked in the plantation, they had the plantation scale. When they worked on the ship, they had the steamer day scale. And they liked that work. If they didn't work hard, somebody else would have their job.
- CC: We jump ahead a little bit, but in the midst of this labor organizing, one of the things right from the very beginning almost was the union's recognition of and support for the proposition that Hawai'i should be a state. Why was that? Why was that part of labor's position?
- RM: Well, as I told you the other day, to use the cliché, it was taxation without representation. People in the territory of Hawai'i were governed by all the laws passed by the Congress but had no say in the enactment of such laws. And under territorial status, if a Congress passed a law, it did not specifically apply to Hawai'i. It did not apply to Hawai'i. Hawai'i had to be incorporated into the act, otherwise it didn't apply. For example, they could pass a minimum wage and not include the territory of Hawai'i. We paid taxes, the same taxes that the people in the other forty-eight states paid, and we felt that we ought to have some say in enacting the laws that we had to obey.

One of the things that was particularly resented was that all of the judges in Hawai'i, except the police court judges, were appointed by the president of the United States and could be from anyplace.

Under the Organic Act, the governor had to be a resident of Hawai'i but not the judges.

CC: So you could have a judge from Pennsylvania or from anywhere at all.

RM: We had several cases where people came over here and got out of the military; within a very short time, [became] appointed judges.

CC: So, basically, it [statehood] was a fairness issue.

RM: Yes.

CC: Who were the people that were kind of allies and who were the people that were opposed to this statehood notion? What were the different forces there?

RM: Generally speaking, from the early 1930s on, the Big Five leadership was pro-statehood. They were worried about sugar legislation. The old sugar act which gave some stability to the industry was not an act in perpetuity. It had to be enacted or re-enacted every now and then. I think the longest the act ever lasted was five years. Usually, it was two years. They had to be continually lobbying back there. It would be different if Hawai'i had a couple of senators and a couple of representatives to wheel and deal with their (chuckles) comrades in the House and Senate.

There were some that were opposed to statehood. They thought that they were doing all right. Walter Dillingham was an excellent example of that. He felt that he could do all right without statehood. And he did all right. Walter had probably more influence in Washington, D.C. during Republican and Democrat administrations than any other individual in the last fifty years.

CC: So, actually, these factions that were for it or against it weren't necessarily all Republicans or all Democrats. There were some Republicans on one side and some on the other? Is that how it . . .

RM: Yes. Many Democrats were opposed to statehood; many Republicans. But there were two plebiscites. And the people of Hawai'i overwhelmingly supported statehood. Overwhelmingly.

WN: So you had different camps opposed to statehood. You were talking about the Republican party being divided up into three types of factions?

RM: Well, there were many factions in the Republican party as there were and are in the Democratic party, but there was not an anti-statehood faction as such. There was the Dillingham faction, but that was not an anti-statehood faction in the Republican party. Many people in the Dillingham faction of the Republican party were pro-statehood.

CC: When the union, when the ILWU specifically, would endorse candidates, it would very often also endorse candidates from one party or the

other. What was really the criteria that would lead to labor's backing of, or at least the ILWU's choosing a candidate to support?

RM: Oh, in a word, selfishness. If we could have an understanding with a candidate from either party as to certain things, and if we could trust him, we would support him. We supported many Republicans. We supported Joe Farrington for delegate to Congress. We supported Hiram Fong for U.S. Senate and for the Territorial House of Representatives. We supported "Doc" Hill from Hilo. Incidentally, "Doc" was anti-statehood.

CC: Okay, for instance, with "Doc" Hill, what were the qualities about "Doc" Hill that would lead to deciding to support even though he took a position against, say, statehood, which you favored?

RM: He was very much like Hiram Fong. His word was good. It was hard to get, but if you could get it, he'd carry it out. I recall one time, he told me that the governor was going to sign a certain bill before the deadline. This bill would have been pocket vetoed by midnight one night and it hadn't been signed. I called up "Doc" about five o'clock in the afternoon. I says, "Is that bill going to be signed?"

He said, "When I give you my word, it's good. That bill will become law." And it was signed.

CC: I think you were saying that in some ways having an enemy that you could count on or knew where they stood was better than a friend that was kind of. . . . How did you say that?

RM: I believe Jack Hall said it, was: we rather have an avowed enemy than a double-crossing friend. You don't have to watch him. You know how he stands. It's that double-crossing friend that you have to look out for.

WN: Was it the same criteria which enabled the union to support Farrington? Or why was Farrington supported?

RM: The person that opposed Joe Farrington that year--I think we're talking 1944, no '46--was Bill Borthwick, who was in the pocket of Governor [Ingram] Stainback. Governor Stainback wanted to get rid of Joe Farrington. Farrington was delegate to Congress. He was back in Washington, D.C. He was closer to the Democratic administration than Governor Stainback, an appointed Democrat. Stainback wanted a Democrat delegate to Congress. We felt that Joe Farrington was the better person. You could talk to Joe Farrington. He certainly wasn't pro-union, but he wasn't anti-union, either. He had a union contract at his newspaper, the Star-Bulletin. He had a contract with the typographical union.

CC: Whereas Stainback was, at least became, one of the major attackers of unionism, only he led sort of the anti-Communist charge at one time.

RM: Well, he used that. I'm reminded of Dick English. He says, "The governor reminds me of a person who's been sleeping with a nest of hornets for years and suddenly discovered it." I think Dick English did that story in the old Saturday Evening Post. When the ILWU refused to support Bill Borthwick for delegate to Congress, Governor Stainback went all out to destroy the ILWU. One of the first things he did was to demand Jack Hall's resignation from the Police Commission. He had appointed Jack Hall to the Police Commission, and he expected Jack, apparently, to say "how high" when he would tell Jack to jump. Well, Jack wouldn't jump. So, he asked for Jack's resignation from the Police Commission. I believe I wrote the resignation.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

CC: Actually, you know, we were jumping around a little bit, but to me, I was being somewhat consistent because I was thinking of Stainback and some of the diatribes he made about the issue of Communism and labor and things like that. I guess we should probably deal with that whole problem and how you saw that issue as being raised, and why, and some of that kind of thing. Why did labor really see that attack being raised against it? What was the extent of the Communist party in Hawai'i? Was it powerful?

RM: I don't think so. It was blown all out of proportion to what it actually was. There was a classic statement about the guy that said he didn't know the difference between rheumatism and Communism; that these leaders of the union are doing fine by him and he's going to stick by them. The issue of Communism was a smoke screen. The ILWU was costing them a lot of money, and they knew it would cost a lot more. They had to figure out a way of getting rid of the ILWU. So they raised the issue of Communism. Of course, the anti-statehood people, most of them were anti-statehood because of the Oriental population, jumped onto the anti-Communist issue, too. It wasn't very popular to go around and say, "I'm against statehood because these Japs are going to take over." But it was popular during that period, that was during the days of Senator McCarthy, to worry about Communism. That if Hawai'i becomes a state, we'll have two stooges of Harry Bridges and Jack Hall in the U.S. Senate. But it was a smoke screen. They wanted to get rid of the ILWU.

CC: The 1949 dock strike was one arena that saw sort of all the ammunition being brought to bear against the union. The anti-Communist tactics were part of that, I guess. Why were they raised so viciously then? What was that . . .

RM: The employers had decided that they would take the ILWU on in its strongest fort, the waterfront. They felt that if they could beat the union on the waterfront, the workers in sugar and pineapple would run away from the union. They determined to just go for broke. I remember when they formed an organization of women. They called it the "Broom Brigade." They picketed the union every morning for two hours. Threw their wives on the picket line, their daughters,

their private secretaries. But they were determined to get rid of the union. They weren't worried about costs on the waterfront. They can always pass that on. The cost of shipping, you can always pass that on. They were worried about the costs and future costs of sugar and pineapple. They felt that if they could beat us at our strongest position, they wouldn't have to worry about sugar and pineapple. It was a well thought out program. And if it hadn't of been for the experienced leadership of the ILWU on the Mainland and the solidarity of the rank-and-file on the Mainland with the people down here, the Big Five would have won that strike.

CC: It was also an issue of parity, too, wasn't it?

RM: That was the issue. The ILWU, before the strike began and all during the strike, offered to arbitrate the issue. They were thirty-two cents apart between San Francisco and Honolulu. The workers in San Francisco loaded the ship. The ship came down here. It was unloaded down here. The only thing that changed in that trip on that ship was the weather and the longshoremen's wages. The longshoremen [in Hawai'i] got thirty-two cents an hour less. Same ship, same cargo, same crew, same union on both ends. The union knew that a longshore strike could create chaos in Hawai'i, so we offered to arbitrate. The employers sort of smeared arbitration as, oh, a Communist plot. They took up a collection among the business community. The collection was taken up by the publisher of the Honolulu Advertiser. They ran double-truck ads in the New York Times and a Washington, D.C. newspaper implying that arbitration was a Communist plot. It so infuriated Senator Wayne Morse that he says if that position is the position of the people of Hawai'i, perhaps they're not ready for statehood.

CC: There was no end to what they would stoop to. You were telling me that at one time in your career, you wrote an article quoting, what was it, a certain source that they claimed was a Communist source and it turned out it wasn't. What was that story?

RM: Oh, I (chuckles) stole verbatim an article from the Wall Street Journal and read it as my own on a radio program. One of the employer's front organizations, IMUA, broadcast the next day that my program of the previous day was a typical Communist propaganda. I had taken it word for word right out of the Wall Street Journal. It was an employer's analysis of desirable unemployment. You don't want everybody out working. If you do, you lose your bargaining power on keeping wages at a given level. So, at that time, according to this Wall Street Journal story, the employers felt 4 percent was the desirable level of unemployment. I knew that these people would think that this story was Communist inspired. Later on, I revealed the whole thing on a radio program, and IMUA fired its research director.

CC: For not catching your source?

RM: Yes.

- WN: That radio show, tell us something about it. How long did you have it. Why did you do it? How you got started.
- RM: The employers owned the newspapers. Both newspapers were part of the local system. They didn't want to see a powerful labor union here. We were able to buy radio time, put our program across. At that time when we started radio, there were only two stations in Hawai'i, KGMB and KGU. One day we were told by KGMB that they're not going to take and let us continue our radio program. Said they're going to be neutral. "We're not going to sell any time to the employers, and we're not going to sell any time to you." Well, the employers had both newspapers. The Advertiser owned (chuckles) KGU, and the Star-Bulletin was heavily invested in KGMB (chuckles), so the employers decided to be "neutral." But then, a person named Ralph Fitkin got a license, and he opened up radio station KHON. And Ralph Fitkin sold us time.
- CC: So, there was pretty good control of the sources of people's information in the hands of a few people.
- RM: Oh, yes. The Japanese newspapers were better than the English papers. Both the Nippu Jiji and the Hawaii Hochi had English sections, but usually only two, three, four pages. But they were better than the English papers.
- CC: I think you told a story and it relates back to, I think, Betty Farrington. A quote about the whole statehood vote that demonstrates something about censorship of the press here. Could you tell us that?
- RM: The Star-Bulletin edited Drew Pearson's column, Drew Pearson being the forerunner of Jack Anderson today. In fact, at that time, Jack Anderson was a leg man for Drew Pearson. The Bulletin edited out a paragraph that quoted Margaret Chase Smith, Senator Smith of Maine, as quoting Betty Farrington as saying, "Thank God the statehood bill didn't pass. I wouldn't have anything to run on next time." No, this time. It was amazing to me because personal columns in newspapers cannot be changed. You can refuse to run the column, but you don't edit the column. But the Star-Bulletin did edit Drew Pearson.
- CC: Didn't you actually print both columns side by side?
- RM: Well, I didn't, but I saw to it that it got to people that did do it. A group of Democrats ran an ad.
- CC: And what did they do in the ad? Compared the two or . . .
- RM: Compared the two.
- CC: Yeah. Well, that gets to an issue about the whole Farrington position. You would say that Mr. Farrington probably was a genuine advocate of statehood and . . .

- RM: Oh, he was. Defintely, he was. . . . He spent all of his time in Washington and a great deal of his personal fortune pursuing statehood.
- WN: How would you compare the tactics or the strategy between Joe Farrington and Jack Burns who later came on as delegate?
- RM: Well, Joe Farrington, being a Republican in an administration totally controlled by Democrats, didn't have much of a chance. The South, at that time, anti-people of color. Most of your people in the South, if they thought about Hawai'i being a state, shuddered at having a non-White in the Congress of the Senate. Jack Burns, a Democrat, he can work with the Democrat House, the Democrat Senate, and a Democrat president. Joe Farrington could work with the individual Republicans, but they were in a small minority. Small minority. Where the Republicans worked with some of the more conservative Southern senators, they couldn't convince the conservative Southern senators to support statehood for Hawai'i because of color.
- CC: Do you think the racism question was the biggest bar to Hawai'i's entry into the union?
- RM: I do, yes. There were several cases where photographs of people in Hawai'i were circulated surreptitiously among the Congressmen. There was one photograph of the Honolulu City Council circulated among Congressmen. I think at that time there was only one part-Hawaiian on the Council--the old, it was Board of Supervisors. I think that Sam Apoliona was there. Sam looked like he might be Haole. Actually, Sam was, I believe, hapa-Haole. But it was race.
- CC: And most of these other issues, whether it was a contiguous state and all those, you see as kind of the same sort of the smoke screen as the Red Scare.
- RM: Contiguity, I think, among many people, was a legitimate issue. But that was a Mainland issue, not a local issue. They weren't thinking of contiguity. That was the Mainland. The people that wanted contiguity were opposed to statehood for Alaska, also, although Alaska was only a few hundred miles away from the state of Washington. But they were opposed to it.
- WN: The race question. The majority of the rank and file of the ILWU consisted of Japanese. So, does that explain why . . .
- RM: I wouldn't say a majority. I'd say a plurality.
- WN: Plurality, okay. Would that explain why the ILWU was singled out on the Mainland as being sort of a threat to Hawai'i. Or if Hawai'i became a state, the ILWU would be too powerful?
- RM: No, that was a job that was started by the employers. Then it got out of hand. The employers formed IMUA. But then, IMUA got out of hand. The employers formed it to help break the 1949 longshore strike. But every member of the lunatic fringe in town got into the

act. The employers in the end just stopped making any contributions to IMUA. But the people in the Mainland would never had heard of any so-called Communist problem in Hawai'i if it hadn't of been for the employers. Gosh, a place like New York City where you really had a large number of Communists, they elected a member to the City Council. They elected a person named Peter Caccione, an Italian, to the City Council. San Francisco, they ran people for mayor, ran people for governor. So this was a myth created by the employers.

CC: A famous instance where you helped tape some FBI officers trying to make a deal with Jack Hall around the Smith Act, didn't they even assess what they thought of the Communist threat here? What was their . . .

RM: Yes. They were interviewing Dave Thompson. He was the ILWU education director. I secretly bugged Dave's living room. In it, during the course of the interview and the conversation, this one agent said, "You can't put these people down here in any league at all with those in California." He says, "These people wouldn't make good Communists in the lowest cell in California. We're stuck with them." Those people, by the way, were subpoenaed by Jack Hall during the Smith Act trial because during the course of that conversation, they offered to see the man who pulled the strings and eliminate Jack as a defendant.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

CC: That whole conversation with the FBI kind of illustrated, though, that the Smith Act trial and a lot of those anti-Communist charges weren't based on any real fear of Communists, right?

RM: Well, certainly not in the minds of the FBI. He said, "These people wouldn't make good Communists in the lowest cell in California. We're stuck with them."

CC: But yet, they brought criminal charges against people.

RM: Yes, they wanted to change the leadership of the ILWU. They said so in that interview with Dave Thompson. As long as Jack Hall'd be a good boy and run the union the way they wanted it, they'd let him off the hook. Jack was the person they wanted to get in the Smith Act trial. The rest were window dressing.

CC: The other group that was organizing that sort of parallels the solidification of the ILWU's base was the Democratic party. I think when we talked, you had some observations about what the return of those servicemen after World War II meant to that kind of organizing. What was the relationship between the Democratic party and the ILWU? Was it an overlap or did one permit the other?

RM: No, the people that wanted to build a Democratic party--there really wasn't one. There was one in name only and a few individuals ran it. They would meet in Senator David Trask's office. Not young

David Trask today, but his father. The whole party could meet in somebody's office. But the people that wanted to build the party, people such as Jack Burns, it gave them a basis, especially the returning veterans. And I'm talking specifically, the Japanese veterans, the 100th and 442. They gave the new Democrat leadership a basis to work from. The Republicans had a base. It was the business community. Run by the big business community.

CC: When you say a base to work from, do you think the Republicans made a pretty big tactical error in not giving more prominence to the returning Nisei veterans?

RM: Oh, yes. They tried to use the returning Japanese. They had them pick out a couple and had them run on the Republican ticket in the primary. But they didn't vote for them and they were never nominated. Would not give them any position of leadership. The Democrats did. That was a very bad mistake by the Republican leadership. One person-- well, there're a couple of people, even more than that, in the Republican party who wanted to bring the Japanese in as equals--was Mary Noonan. She worked very hard to bring in the Japanese and brought many of them into the Republican party. But they were never given positions of leadership. Never.

CC: Whereas Jack Burns perceived a more, well, better use, I guess, of this sort of political force or. . . .

RM: Jack treated everybody as equals. Not because they were Japanese. He treated the Filipinos the same way as he would treat the Haoles. Jack was a religious man. He liked people. The Republican's refusal to absorb the Japanese into their leadership gave Jack Burns an opportunity. But it wasn't just Jack Burns. There were many others. One person who was very active in building the Democratic party was in public relations for Castle & Cooke--Bill Norwood. Bill, later on, became governor of the Trust Territories during the Kennedy Administration. He was very active in building the Democrat party with Burns. As a matter of fact, he was Burns's administrative assistant during Burns's first term as governor.

CC: You know there's a lot of talk about the two Jacks, Burns and Hall. What was their relationship? You put it a certain way when we talked before. Maybe you could tell us that. That's a good way of looking at it.

RM: I don't recall what I said, but Jack Hall and Jack Burns were close friends. But unlike what many people choose to believe, Jack Hall did not control Governor Burns. Burns had a mind of his own. Burns wanted a consensus government. And he built a consensus government. You look at Jack Burns's appointments. You always found a Big Five representative on the Board of Regents at the University of Hawai'i. You found C.C. Cadagan of Alexander & Baldwin. You found Harold Eichelberger of American Factors. Whenever Governor Burns would appoint an ad hoc committee, you'd find the top business community leaders there. Somebody from the Dillingham operations. He had a

consensus government.

And although he was a very staunch Catholic, went to mass every morning at 6:30, 7:00, he never let his personal religious views interfere with the operations of the state. I remember when the legislature overwhelmingly decriminalized abortions. He did not sign the bill. He let the bill become law without his signature. But he said at the time that although he personally abhorred abortions, he could not impose his wishes on the people, especially after the legislature had overwhelmingly passed the law.

- CC: How much credit do you think he deserves for the statehood measure finally passing Congress?
- RM: Probably more than anyone else at the time it happened. There were others who worked longer than Jack did, but Jack was able to work things out with President Johnson who at that time was Democrat leader of the Senate. He told Burns, "If you will back off this year and let Alaska come in first, I'll promise you that Hawai'i will come in next." And Jack Burns did that. He was severely criticized by the local newspapers for backing off. But Johnson delivered. First Alaska became the forty-ninth state, and we became the fiftieth. There was no way anyone else could have worked that out with Lyndon Johnson.
- CC: Might have hurt Burns, actually, when he had to come back and face Quinn in the first campaign for governor. How come he lost?
- RM: Bill Quinn was elected governor on a gimmick--the Second Mahele, where they were going to take all of these state lands and sell 'em to people for as little as \$50 an acre. Bill Quinn couldn't deliver. He caused the Second Mahele bill to be introduced into the Senate which was controlled by the Republicans at that time. The bill never even got out of his own Republican committee. The Second Mahele program of his elected him; and then when he didn't deliver, it defeated him.
- I was watching that [first] election [of 1959] very closely. Quinn's majority was dwindling. If that campaign had gone another ten days, Burns would have beaten Quinn because people were catching on to this Second Mahele. If you read it, you could see that the land that was going to be put on the market, well, one area was Kekaha Sugar Company. (Chuckles) Would have put Kekaha Sugar Company out of business. Lot of people don't know it, but much of the land that many plantations have is leased from the state. No, Bill Quinn was a sincere person, but whoever talked him into that Mahele misused him. Certainly the Republicans weren't for it. They couldn't get it out of their own Republican Senate committee.
- CC: Do you think Burns had to play catch up because he'd been in Washington for those years, and when he came back, Quinn had sort of gotten some of the credit for statehood by being governor at the time?

RM: Well, that, Quinn's being governor helped him. It helped him. The Republican party was split when Sam King was governor. Sam King was Bill Quinn's predecessor as governor of the territory. There was a lot of people that didn't like Sam getting that 'cause Sam was not pro-Eisenhower. Sam was not pro-Eisenhower, he was pro-Taft. So, when Eisenhower got the nomination, the Eisenhower people felt that they ought to name the governor. As it was, a Taft supporter got the governorship and the Republican party was split. So, when Sam King was not reappointed, they put in Bill Quinn who was a Republican but was a middle of the roader. All the Republicans were happy.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Would you say that statehood was a bipartisan achievement or was that a victory for the Democratic party in Hawai'i?

RM: It was bipartisan. There were Democrats that opposed it, especially some in the South. Not as many as there would have been had we had a Republican president. Because Lyndon Johnson knew how to get legislation through.

WN: What about locally, though?

RM: It was bipartisan. The people of Hawai'i in both plebiscites voted overwhelmingly for statehood. The constitution convention, which was held before we were a state, was bipartisan. It was under the control of the Republicans, by the way. Sam King was the chairman of it, and Hebden Porteus, the secretary. Hebden at that time, I believe he was in the Territorial Senate. No, it was bipartisan.

WN: Why was the ILWU opposed to the first constitution?

RM: Basically, because of the limited number of elected officials. It's the same today, by the way. It provided that only the governor and the lieutenant governor could be elected. I think we're the tightest state in the union as far as the election of public officials. Many of them have sixty or seventy elected officials, if you count judges as public officials. It did not provide for initiative, referendum, or recall. At that particular time, the union was for initiative, referendum, and recall. Today, it is opposed to it, and I believe, for good reason. Today, it seems that initiative on certain issues incites a mob reaction.

Well, perhaps the best example was the time we caused fluoridation to be put on the ballot over on the Big Island, and it was destroyed two to one. One of the finest things for children in the world is the fluoridation of the water supply. It's done by the military, by the way, right here in Hawai'i. But people vote against it. They believe that fluoride will poison them in some way. People are

swayed by public relations firms in initiatives.

- WN: We were talking earlier about groups that were opposing statehood. And one group that we didn't talk about was the Native Hawaiian group. Like, for example, Kamokila Campbell. Can you tell me something about that viewpoint?
- RM: Kamokila was of the old school. She felt loyalty to Lili'uokalani, the old crown. Kamokila, incidentally, although she was opposed to statehood, was elected to public office. She was a senator elected from Maui. She was not of that group--well, in fact, it didn't exist--today, the group that's pretty well intellectually led by Haunani Trask. Kamokila was a very wealthy woman. Well, not too wealthy. She had some land privately, but she was a beneficiary of the Campbell Estate. She wasn't advocating that Hawai'i be given its independence. She just felt a loyalty to the old monarchy. Felt that they were very shabbily treated, and they were.
- CC: So, there wasn't a real independence movement amongst the Hawaiian population back in those days?
- RM: No, no.
- CC: That's a recent. . . .
- RM: It's modern. I'd say, fifteen years.
- END OF INTERVIEW

PERSPECTIVES ON HAWAI'I'S STATEHOOD

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
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