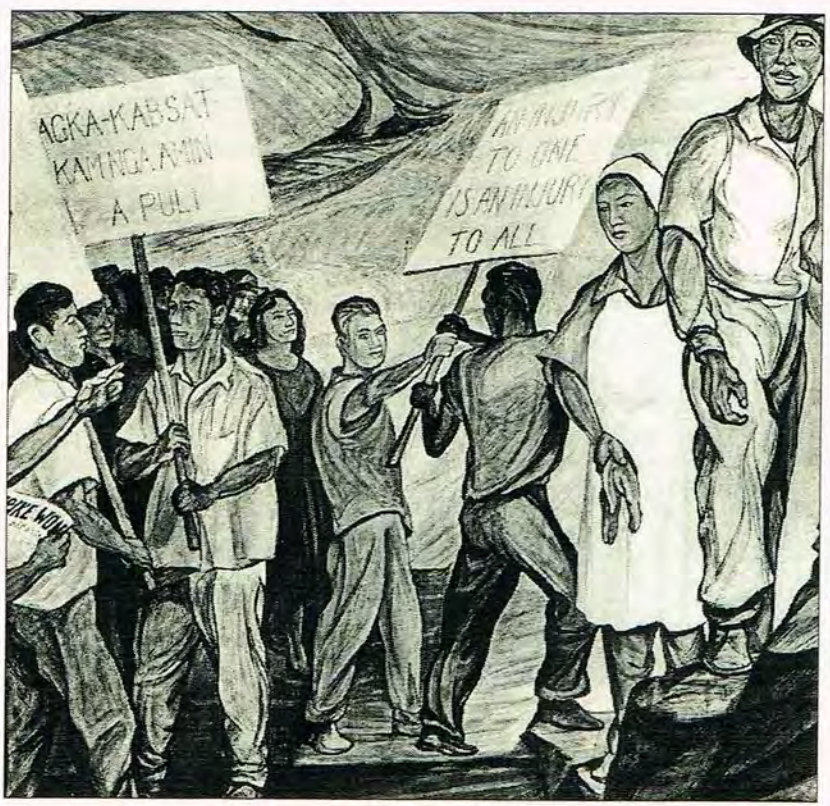
1946

SAKADA

Filipinos

and the

ILWU



50th Anniversary of 1946 Sakada Filipinos and the ILWU

The 1946 Filipino *Sakadas* (meaning newcomers) were only 6,000 individuals, but more than any other group, they helped shaped and were themselves changed by the historic forces that were transforming Hawaii into a modern, democratic society.

The 6,000 Filipino *Sakadas* were recruited by the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) to work the sugar plantations of the Hawaiian Islands. At that time in history, sugar was king in Hawaii with 30,000 workers producing an annual crop worth $100 million. If sugar was king, then pineapple was queen, with a crop worth $60 million produced by 20,000 regular and seasonal workers. A crop worth $160 million is a fabulous sum by today's standard and even more so in the 1940s, considering that a sugar field worker earned 25 cents an hour.

The *Sakadas* were swept into a social movement of working people struggling for dignity and justice. This was a movement that was generations in the making but in 1946, working people were on the verge of revolutionizing Hawaii's society and transforming long standing social class and economic relationships in the Islands. The *Sakadas* became part of that social upheaval and their skills, energy, and dedication contributed to the success of that movement.

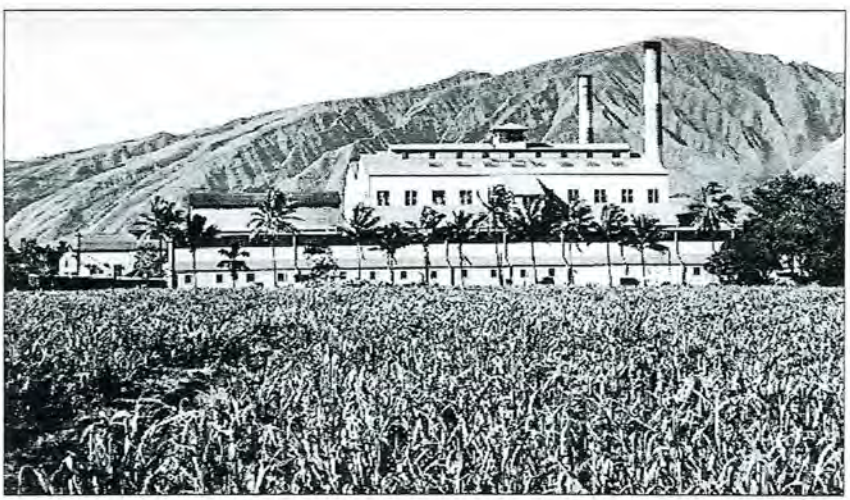
By joining the ILWU and the Great Sugar Strike of 1946, the *Sakadas* received a crash course in organization, leadership, political-economy, and civics. This knowledge was power and would improve their lives and the lives of their families. In building their union, the *Sakada* achieved a level of job and income security that would enable them to make a good life in Hawaii or return to the Philippines with dignity and a comfortable sum of money.

The *Sakadas* can be proud of their role and contributions in building Hawaii.

PART I: Hawaii

Sugar and pineapple were big and profitable businesses, and the needs of the industries came to dominate the government and life of the Hawaiian Islands. Sugar was no longer produced by small farmers, but by 33 large-scale plantation operations, each employing hundreds of workers and covering 1000s of acres of the best agricultural lands. In turn the plantations were owned or controlled subsidiaries of five parent companies—American Factors (Amfac), C. Brewer, Alexander & Baldwin, Castle & Cooke, and the smallest with only four plantations, Theo H. Davies & Co. The five companies were called the Big Five, and they absolutely dominated economic life in the Islands.

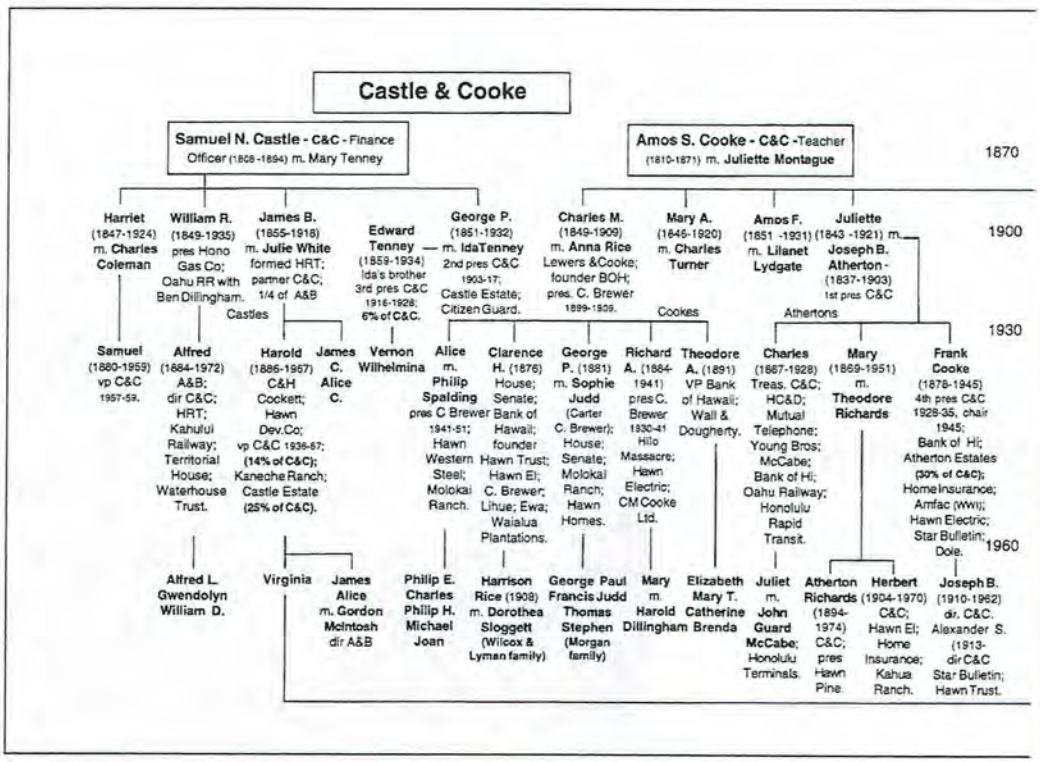
No where else was wealth so highly concentrated then in the Hawaiian Islands. The immense wealth produced by sugar and pineapple workers went to line the pockets of the descendants of only four families—Alexander, Baldwin, Castle, and Cooke—direct descendants of the missionaries who came to Hawaii from 1820-1830. William Alexander and Dwight Baldwin were missionaries. Amos Cooke was a teacher and Samuel Castle handled the finances and purchasing for the mission companies.



Maui's Pioneer Mill, an Amfac company (Billy Howell).

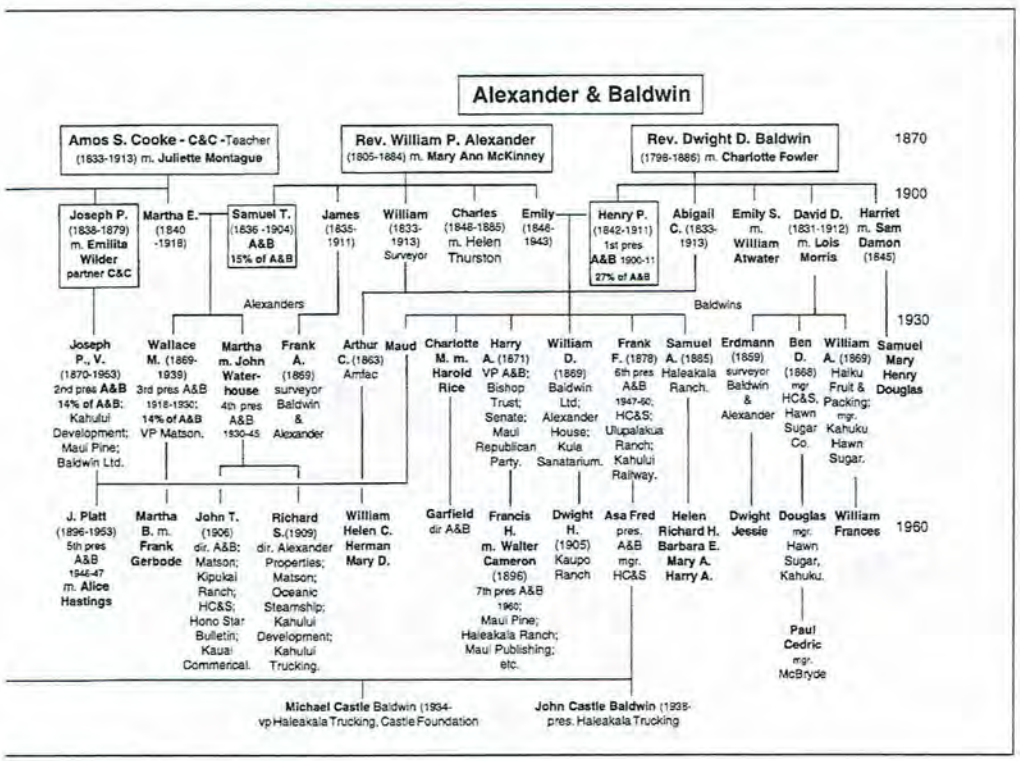
In the second generation, the families began to intermarry: Samuel Alexander married Martha Cooke, brother William married Abigail Baldwin, and sister Emily married Henry Baldwin. Other family members married into prominent families—Wilder, Lydgate, Thurston, Damon, Tenney, Rice, Atherton, Atwater. In the third generation, Joseph Cooke married Maud Baldwin. Other family alliances through marriage included—Spalding, Judd, Richards, Waterhouse. In the fourth generation, Asa Fred Baldwin married Virginia Castle, Mary Cook married Harold Dillingham.

By the second generation, the family fortune included Castle & Cooke, Castle Estate, Alexander & Baldwin, Honolulu Gas Company, Oahu Railroad, Honolulu Rapid Transit, Lewers & Cooke, Bank of Hawaii, and C. Brewer. By the third generation, the family controlled the four major sugar holding companies of Castle & Cooke, Alexander & Baldwin, C. Brewer, and Amfac



which controlled 27 of Hawaii's 33 sugar plantations and 88% of an annual sugar crop worth $100 million.

Besides sugar, the families' business extended into almost every economic activity of the islands—in addition to the companies listed above, the family business now included Kahului Railway, Waterhouse Trust, C&H Cockett Refinery, Hawaiian Development Company, Kaneohe Ranch, Hawaiian Western Steel, Molokai Ranch, Hawaiian Trust, Hawaiian Electric, CM Cooke Ltd., Wall & Dougherty, Mutual Telephone, Young Brothers, Atherton Estates, Home Insurance, Amfac, Honolulu Star Bulletin, Kahului Development, Maui Pine, Baldwin Ltd., Matson Navigation, McCabe, Bishop Trust, Ulupalakua Ranch, Haleakala Ranch, Haiku Fruit & Packing. Many of the 49 children and grandchildren held large blocks on stocks, sat on the board of directors of these companies, or served in the Hawaiian legislature.



One Big Happy Family

While plantation families lived in simple, aging wooden shacks, the missionary descendants began to build fabulous mansions in Nuuanu that would match the mansions of high society in New York or Chicago. The mansions were filled with imported crystal chandeliers, Italian marble, and works of art. The building spree created a mini-construction boom in Honolulu. While plantation children labored in the fields, the children of the missionaries sent their children to Harvard, Yale, and finishing schools in England. The class of owners and the class of workers lived in two different worlds.

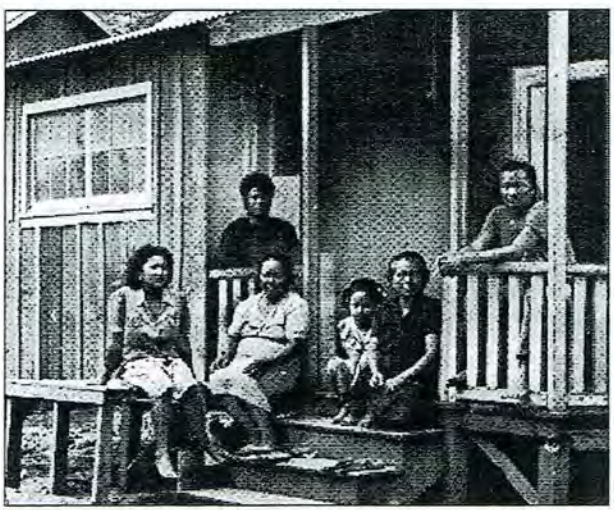
In the US Bureau of Labor Statistics report of 1939, James Shoemaker detailed the management structure of Hawaii's economy:

> There has been a considerable degree of intermarriage among the more influential families of the Territory, possibly because of the relative isolation of Hawaii. Interfamily relationships, as well as intrafamily holdings, are thus an additional significant feature in the integration of industry.
>
> But it should be noted that, because of the intercorporate relations mentioned above, the centralization of control is not confined to the sugar industry alone, but extends into practically every aspect of the economic life of Hawaii.
>
> Over half of the pineapple industry is island-owned, and it is closely connected through interlocking directors, and intrafamily holdings, with the sugar industry. The same may be said of the public utilities, the Matson and Inter-Island steamship companies, the large hotels, and a great variety of minor corporate enterprises.
>
> Thus the Territory of Hawaii possesses a strongly centralized industrial structure, highly integrated in its broader aspects as well as its minor details, not only in the economic, but even in the social and political aspects of island life.

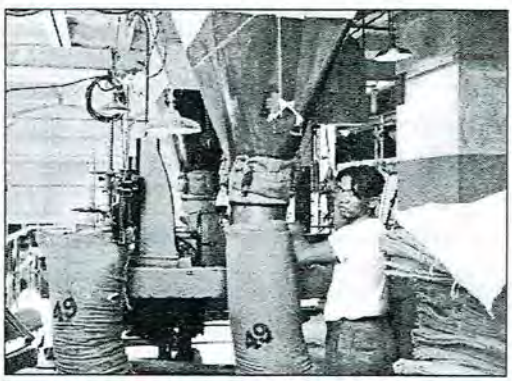
Management fought unions

Shoemaker's report included the following description of management attitudes towards labor and labor unions:

> Although many of the large enterprises maintain effective employee-welfare policies, their attitude may best be described as benevolently paternalistic rather than liberal. The history of management in Hawaii, broadly speaking, is one of antagonism to labor organization.
>
> The high degree of intercorporate control makes its possible to mobilize the resources of all large enterprises to restrict the growth of labor unions and to combat strikes in whatever fields of industry they may occur. Thus, although management has done much for labor in Hawaii, it has also used every influence at its command to restrict labor organization.
>
> The position of the individual plantation worker is especially vulnerable. The house in which he lives, the store from which he buys, the fields in which he finds his recreation, the hospital in which he is treated, are all owned by plantation management, which in turn has its policies controlled from the offices of the factors in Honolulu.



Pre-1930s sugar plantation housing (The ILWU Story).



Bagging raw sugar at the mill (US Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics).

PART 2: A Sad Story of Defeat

Hawaii sugar workers made many efforts to improve their conditions, but every attempt was defeated by the coordinated resources of the Big 5.

On Dec. 1, 1908, Japanese intellectuals and businessmen formed the Higher Wage Consummation Association to push for a pay raise for Japanese sugar workers at Aiea Plantation on Oahu. The Association presented their demands to the HSPA in January, 1909, for equal pay with Portuguese and Puerto Rican workers. At the time the Japanese received $18 a month for 26 working days or $.65 a day. Portuguese and Puerto Ricans doing the same work received $22.50, better housing, and an acre of land to farm. The HSPA refused to even acknowledge the existence of the Association.

1909 Japanese strike

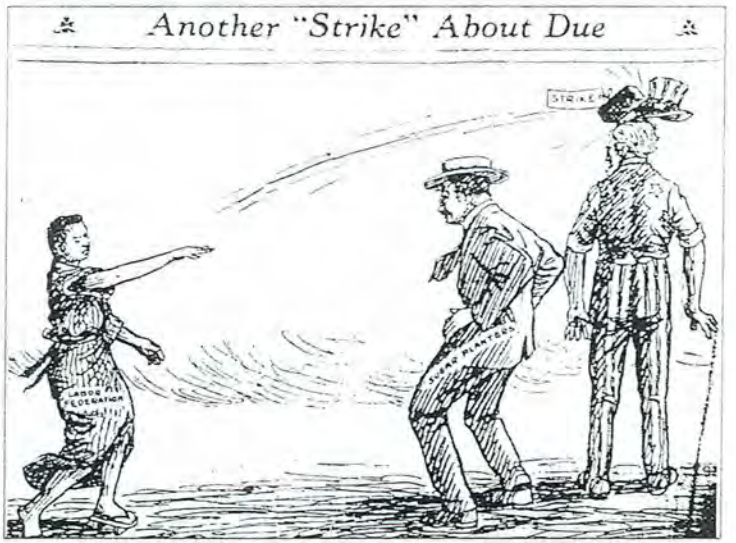
The Association called a strike on May 8, 1909, and over 7000 Japanese workers walked off the Oahu plantations. The Big 5 quickly marshaled their considerable resources to crush the strike. The strikers were vilified by the local papers. Judges issued injunctions to prohibit leaders of the Association from "interfering with, hindering, obstructing or stopping the operation of the plantation of the Oahu Sugar Company."

The Japanese strike leaders were arrested and held in jail under "emergency measures" and charged with conspiracy." Each time they were released on bail they were rearrested. The leaders were later found guilty of conspiracy and sentenced to 10 months in prison.

The Japanese struck only on Oahu and plantations on the neighbor islands paid into a $ 2 million fund to break the strike. The Japanese organized along racial lines and this allowed the planters to use one nationality against the other by hiring replacement workers among the Hawaiian, Korean, Portuguese, Chinese and other non-Japanese workers at twice the pay.

After three months the strike was broken. Then having "proved" that unionism doesn't pay, the HSPA decided to correct some of the worst abuses so that workers would not be driven to form unions again. Within a few months, wages of Japanese workers were raised to $20 a month, a bonus was introduced and improvements were made in sanitation and housing.

After the 1909 strike, the HSPA began recruiting large numbers of Filipino workers to counter the Japanese, who comprised the majority of plantation workers. As the Filipino population grew, the planters created separate ethnic camps for Filipinos, Japanese, and other workers. The planters reasoned that the separated ethnic groups would make it harder to organize.



Newspaper cartoons pictured Japanese labor organizers as a threat to America.

STATEMENT BY THE HAWAIIAN SUGAR PLANTERS' ASSOCIATION

The present strike of laborers is not in our opinion due to dissatisfaction wi their compensation or the conditions of their employment. Laborers have repeatedly informed plantation managers that they are satisfied, but state that if the Japanese Federation of Labor calls a strike they must obey orders.

The action taken by the Japanese Federation of Labor is, as we see it, an anti American movement designed to obtain control of the sugar business of the Hawaiian Islands.

The Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association feels that it is absolutely necessary to oppose this movement to a finish no matter how long it takes, how much it may cost or how much inconvenience it may cause.

HAWAIIAN SUGAR PLANTERS' ASSOCIATION,
By J. WATERHOUSE, President.

1920 Filipino and Japanese strike

After the defeat of 1909, it took ten years for Japanese workers to rebuild their organization. In 1919 the Japanese organized a series of labor organizations on the various islands and later that year combined them into the Federation of Japanese Labor In Hawaii. Filipinos formed a separate Filipino Labor Union.

In December 1919 the Federation of Japanese Labor presented their demands to the HSPA. Their demands included improvements in the bonus system to prevent cheating by lunas (foremen) and managers, an increase in wages from $.77 to $1.25 per day, an eight hour day, maternity leave of two weeks before and two weeks after birth, double-time for overtime, Sundays, and holidays, and improvements in housing and medical facilities. The HSPA rejected the demands and refused to see two representatives sent by the union.

In 1920 the Filipino Labor Union called their members out on strike. Four days later they were joined by the Japanese Federation of Labor. Together, they struck six Oahu plantations. During the strike 12,000 strikers and their families were forcibly evicted from their plantation homes; 6,000 strikers camped out in Honolulu and over 1,200 died in an influenza epidemic.

1920 strike headquarters (Honolulu Advertiser).

Anti-Japanese hate propaganda was spread again. The Federation of Japanese Labor changed its name to Hawaii Labor's Federation because of these anti-Japanese attacks. Filipino leader Pablo Manlapit called off the Filipino strike and then changed his mind. The planters used this to spread rumors of bribes paid to Manlapit. They published leaflets showing Manlapit leaving on a boat with bags of money.

After suffering terrible losses the workers called off the strike in June, 1920. The HSPA broke the strike after spending $12 million.

1924 Filipino strike

Pablo Manlapit began rebuilding the Filipino Labor Union. In 1922 he claimed 13,000 members. Asking for a $2 daily wage, the eight-hour day, and the elimination of the voluntary bonus, he led a strike of Filipino sugar workers on April 1,1924, on Oahu. The strike spread to the neighbor islands and grew to involve Filipino workers on 23 of the 45 plantations.

Pablo Manlapit (Hawaii State Archives).

On Kauai two pro-company Filipinos were detained by the strikers. The police stationed deputized sharpshooters around the strike camp in Hanapepe and went to rescue the two company men. Without warning, the sharpshooters opened fire. When it ended 16 strikers and 4 policemen were dead and many wounded. In the aftermath, 76 strikers were tried and 60 received 4 year prison terms.

Manlapit was jailed for two years and then exiled from Hawaii. The HSPA paid for the prosecution's case against Manlapit, because the Territory did not have the funds. With their leaders in jail, the Filipinos gave up the strike after 8 months. The labor movement was again broken in Hawaii for another 10 years.

ILWU unionism

In 1934, Hawaii workers began learning about the success of a new multi-racial and democratic union on the West Coast called the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU).

Hawaii longshore workers took these lessons and organized along the same multi-racial and democratic lines at several Hawaii ports. The employers used all their old tricks to break the union, but this only re-enforced the worker's belief and necessity of "all for one and one for all" in reaction to "divide and rule." The newly enacted National Labor Relation Act also protected the rights of workers to form unions without interference from employers.

Detail from the ILWU mural Solidaridad Sindical (Pablo O Higgins).

Last ethnic strike

In 1937, three thousand members of the Vibora Luviminda, an organization of Filipino workers organized by Antonio Fagel, struck the Puunene Plantation on Maui. The strikers demanded higher wages, a change in the system of pay for cane cutters, and the discharge of five lunas.

Fagel and nine other strikers were arrested for "conspiracy to commit unlawful imprisonment" when they took a non-striking Puunene worker to the strike headquarters and allegedly forced him to sign a pledge to support the walkout. Even with Fagel in jail, the strike held solid for four months, and the plantation owners sat down at the bargaining table and reached an agreement with the striking workers, conceding many of their demands. The strike became a landmark in Hawaiian labor history but it left no lasting organization.

PART 3: Labor Organizes

In 1944, the Big 5 sugar owners were concerned about a new round of labor organizing by the ILWU on the sugar plantations. "Divide and rule" had always been effective, so the Big 5 put into motion a two-year plan to recruit 6,000 Filipino laborers from the Philippines. During the war, the Philippines were occupied by the Japanese, and the Big 5 reasoned that the Filipinos would not get along with the Hawaii Japanese who still made up the majority of plantation workers.

The Hawaii Sugar Planters Association intended to use the *Sakadas* as unwitting pawns in their continuing plan to dominate and control plantation workers.

Hawaii longshore workers, now affiliated with the ILWU, were struggling to keep their union alive on the waterfront. The longshore workers knew they were up against powerful employers who owned or controlled the steamship companies, the stevedoring companies, the sugar plantations, and most of Hawaii's economy. The longshore workers understood that their survival depended on the successful unionization of workers in other Big 5 industries.

During World War II, Hawaii came under martial law and military government. In 1943, the military governors relaxed some of their control and allowed federal agencies such as the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to do their job in handling labor relations.

In 1944, taking advantage of the return of some civilian freedom, ILWU longshore workers used $5,000 from their treasury to send teams of longshoremen to unionize their brothers and sisters on the sugar plantations. They carried thousands of small white cards reading, "This is the Law," which described the right to unionize under the National Labor Relations Act. Sugar workers joined the effort and together they talked to and signed up thousands of plantation workers on the white cards which called for union elections on the plantations as provided under federal law.

The ILWU called in the National Labor Relations Board to supervise and run union elections on the plantations. The law required at least a majority of workers to vote for the union, but in 54 elections, the ILWU received over 97% of the votes cast. In a matter of 12 months, 20,000 field and plantation workers were unionized.

The surge of union activity carried over into the political arena. In the 1944 Territorial elections, labor elected 16 House candidates and 8 senate candidates. Two members of the ILWU were elected to the House. Many of the anti-labor laws were repealed. The anti-picketing law, in effect from 1923 until 1945 and used so effectively against labor, was repealed by the Territorial legislature. The "Little Wagner Act" extended the National Labor Relations Act coverage to field and agricultural workers.

Part 4: The Sugar Strike

Organizing a union is only the first step; the sugar workers still had to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the sugar companies. The first sugar agreement was negotiated in August 1945 and was only possible because of an uneasy truce between labor and capital to cooperate for the war effort. When the contract was up for negotiations in 1946, it was clear that the sugar employers were out to destroy the union and return to the good old days when there was no union on the plantations.

The sugar workers made careful preparations and built an organization that reached into every plantation camp. Counting their families, there were close to 75,000 people living in plantation camps.

When the ILWU learned about HSPA plans to recruit 6,000 Filipinos, the union had organizers sign up as marine cooks and stewards on board the ships that sailed from the Philippines to Hawaii. By the time the *Sakadas* reached Hawaii, they knew all about unions and were already ILWU members.

The first group of the 6,000 *Sakadas* landed in Hawaii on January 30, 1946. When they arrived at their assigned plantations, they were greeted by ILWU brass bands and invited to picnics and luaus by ILWU sugar members. They were welcomed as brothers and brought into the union organization as equals.

The *Sakadas* were thousands of miles from home, among strangers, with little or no money, yet they became some of the strongest supporters in the sugar workers' fight for dignity and union organization.

When contract negotiations began, the Big Five refused to bargain in good faith. When negotiations collapsed, 94% of the ILWU members voted in favor of a strike. On September 1, 1946, 25,000 sugar workers walked off the job.

Their demands were: $.65 minimum cash wages; a 40 hour workweek; a union shop; a reduction of the cost of perquisites (housing, water, fuel and other essentials supplied by the plantations).

Strike breaking tactics

In the first month the Big 5 tried to split union members from their leaders, calling them "malihinis" from the mainland, red-baited, and jew-baited. Then Matson and the Big Five tried to starve people until mainland longshoremen broke the blockade. Spies on the plantations snooped around to find families that were going broke and offered them a 100# bag of rice if they got a group of people together and returned to work. The Big Five deliberately tried to get the 6,000 newly arrived Filipinos to break off from the union. They stepped up publication of the "Little Filipino" paper (which urged the Filipinos to return to work) from 1,500 to 25,000 copies.

The Sakadas were some of the most active picketers during the strikes (Oahu, 1946, ILWU Library).

Court ordered injunctions limited picketing to three people. But injunctions didn't say you couldn't parade, so when the plantations got an injunction on Kauai, the next day there were some 7,000 ILWU men, women and children holding a parade instead.

In Maui County criminal charges were brought against 79 strikers for unlawful assembly at Paia. The unlawful assembly act was adopted in 1869 to prevent demonstrations by native Hawaiians unhappy about the land distribution of the Great Mahele. Under the law, a sheriff, cop, or a judge could decide that a group of three or more people constituted an unlawful assembly and could order them dispersed or jailed. The arrests stopped when the ILWU told the District Attorney the union had 10,000 people lined up to go to jail and they were not going to be bailed out.

Gains won

The strike lasted 79 days and the *Sakadas* played a major role in the victory. Sugar workers won the strike by organizing and involving every member in some kind of strike activity. Every member had a job to do, whether it was walking the picket line, gathering food, growing vegetables, hunting or fishing for the communal soup kitchens.

Sugarworkers won more increases than they received in the past twenty years. Vacations and sick leave pay improved. The union won a promise of no discrimination on the job and on promotions. The strike did away with the prerequisite system and changed it to cash benefits instead which prevented discrimination in the assignments of houses and other benefits.

In the 1946 elections, unions succeeded in electing 37 labor-endorsed candidates to the Territorial and County Houses. This was the beginning of the end of Hawaii's feudalism and paternalism.

The power of unionization had changed the lives of 75,000 sugar workers and their families. A year later, the struggle spread to involve 40,000 pineapple workers and their families. The union movement had spread too far and too wide to ever be contained again. The Big 5 stranglehold of Hawaii's economy and social life was ended.

The Big 5 would have to learn to live with unions and to give workers a fair share of the wealth they produce.

PART 5: Filipino workers gain through unionism

The *Sakada* and thousands of Filipino workers found their greatest opportunity for advancement through unionism.

The democratic unionism of the ILWU enable workers to advance collectively—the conditions of every member of the group is improved. The union organization brings workers together and calls on individuals to share their skills, talent, and energy to work for the good of the whole.

This is in contrast with individual advancement where aggressive or enterprising people hoard their skills and talents to get ahead, while others are left behind.

The *Sakada* were united with workers of all races in the ILWU. Working collectively, ILWU sugar workers negotiated contracts with their employers, with each successive contract building on the gains of earlier contracts.

Following are some of the collective gains made by the *Sakadas* and their fellow ILWU union members:

- **Homeownership**. The 1946 sugar strike victory established the principle that plantations could not exploit their workers through plantation housing. This later enabled the ILWU to arrange the sale and transfer of plantation homes to workers at truly affordable rates. Home ownership was out of the range of most workers, but through collective action, sugar workers became homeowners, which laid the foundation for a stable and secure family life.

- **Health Care**. The union established family medical and dental care as a basic benefit under the union contract. The union worked to improve this health and welfare package to keep pace with medical technology. The union educated members on preventive medicine and how to make use of their health and welfare benefits. This led to a general improvement in the health of plantation families. Plantations workers were now assured that a major illness or medical condition would not bankrupt the family.

- **Purchasing power**. The union contract provided for regular wage gains that steadily improved the buying power of plantation workers. This allowed workers to budget their resources, to save, and to make major purchases. Before the union, wages remained virtually unchanged and prices at plantation controlled stores kept workers impoverished. The typical plantation worker had no automobile, refrigerator or washing machine. Their children did not finish high school. Unionization changed all of this.

- **Fair treatment**. The union contract put an end to discrimination and unfair treatment on the job. As long as their work performance was satisfactory, the *Sakadas* and other sugar workers could be assured of a lifelong job. This was job security only a union contract could offer to workers.

- **Training and promotions**. The union contract established seniority as a basic job right. Promotions and preferred assignments would go first to the most senior, qualified worker. Job training and apprenticeship programs enabled the *Sakada* and other sugar workers to gain skills and move up the job ladder to higher paying plantation jobs. The *Sakadas* may have come to Hawaii as an unskilled, farm laborers, but through union-established job training programs, many Sakadas became welders, mechanics, clerks, truck drivers, or machine operators.

- **Job rights**. Through unionization, sugar workers gained the power to handle problems with their supervisors and to improve their working conditions. This greatly improved morale and job satisfaction. A sugar job was now a good job, and sugar work became a lifetime career. Many of the *Sakadas* would work the next 20, 30 or 40 or more years and retire from the plantation.

- **Incentives for early retirement.** Unionization enabled sugar workers to meet the challenge of automation that sharply reduced jobs on the plantations. The ILWU negotiated a unique program for *Sakadas* who wanted to permanently return to the Philippines. Upon retirement, the *Sakadas* would get a one-way ticket and their retirement benefits in a lump-sum. The lump-sum pension amounted to a small fortune in the Philippines and many *Sakadas* took advantage of this program. Encouraging older workers to retire meant more jobs could go to younger workers.

- **Retirement security**. The union contract also provided regular pension benefits for sugar workers and the *Sakadas* who made Hawaii their permanent home. Sugar retirees continue to receive medical and housing benefits.

- **Community life**. The sugar strike taught workers to look out for each other and to share and pool their resources. These new values transformed the old, segregated plantation camps and brought people together into close-knit plantation communities. Sugar workers became more active in civic affairs, and they worked to improve the schools, recreational facilities, and government services to rural areas.

- **Political freedom**. Before the union, the plantations and their managers expected workers to support Republican candidates, and managers prohibited Democratic Party candidates from campaigning in plantation camps. Union protection ended discrimination against workers because of their political affiliations and activities. The new freedom made it possible for sugar workers to become active in politics and support the candidates of their choice. This led to a dramatic growth of the Democratic Party and put an end to Big Five/Republican Party domination of Hawaii's government.

The *Sakadas* have made a great and lasting contribution to Hawaii and in doing so, the *Sakadas* have made a good life for themselves and their offspring.

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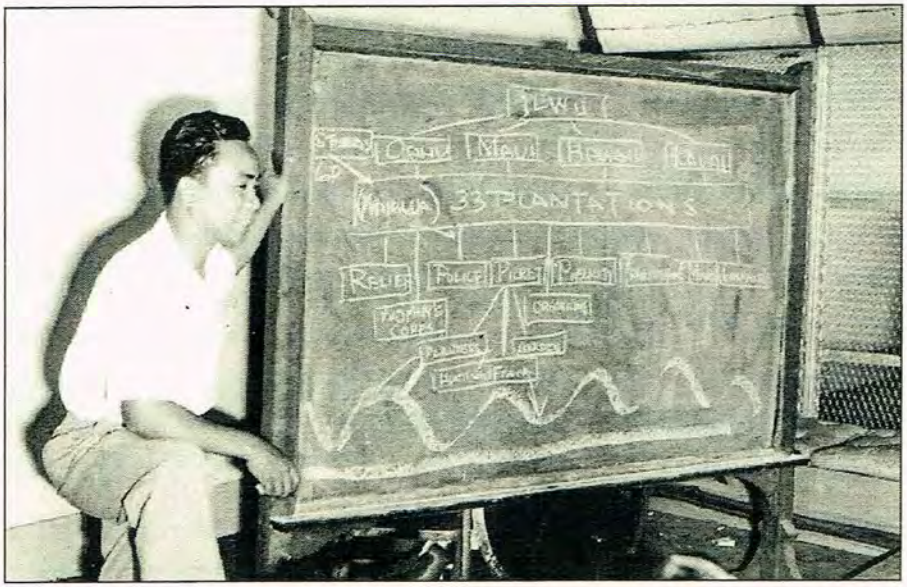
A unique sugar contract benefit enabled hundreds of Sakadas to retire to the Philippines with a small fortune and monthly social security payments.



Organization and a democratic union structure were the keys to gains won by the Sakadas and other sugar workers in 1946. Today, unionization continues to offer workers their greatest opportunity for advancement.

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