



HAWAII NEWS

Kalama Valley protests of 1971 commemorated

By Leila Fujimori lfujimori@staradvertiser.com · May 12, 2021



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More than 100 people Tuesday commemorated the 50th anniversary of Kokua Hawaii, a multi-ethnic coalition of activists who stood with the Native Hawaiian families and farmers being evicted from Kalama Valley.

A group of 32 activists with Kokua Hawaii were arrested May 11, 1971, while standing their ground when bulldozers were clearing houses to make way for a Henry J. Kaiser development on Bishop Estate land in what is now part of what is called Hawaii Kai.

Gary Pak, who joined the movement, initially called Kokua Kalama, said it was one of the first land struggles in over 100 years in Hawaii, he said.

"It's not to say that Hawaii was not a hotbed of activism," Pak said, and described the striking workers in the 1910s on through 1946 with the Hawaii sugar strike. But there was a lull in the 1950s and early part of the 1960s, he said. "Then came Kalama Valley," he said, describing a lot of different people working together, joining forces.

Claire Shimabukuro was 18 years old when she helped organize Kalama Valley people to support the farmers, scrap metal dealers and local families.

"They were bulldozing houses with people in them. Profits over people," she said of Bishop Estate landowner and developer Henry Kaiser.

The activists pitched tents at pig farmer George Santos' farm.

"We all gained organizing skills," she said. "We most always act on behalf of the masses — always not as an individual, but as part of a collective," she said.

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John Witeck, who moved from Washington, D.C., and had marched with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Ala., recalls seeing a house being bulldozed with all the people's furniture and belongings still inside. He said Kaiser was not just a big contractor, but a war profiteer.

Raymond Catania, who was among the 32 arrested, said, "It was easy for me to support the struggle in Kalama Valley because I already was an anti-imperialist, a young protester against the war in Vietnam who understood that Hawaii was a launching pad, that the lands were stolen from the kanaka maoli to kill and oppress people in other countries like the Vietnamese."

"Still, to this day, I believe Kalama Valley was a fight against rich people all over America and all over the world."

He said Kalama Valley influenced other struggles over eviction. It "was a single spark that started the prairie fire," he said, fighting against Bishop Estate and other landlords.

The group members noted the irony that Bishop Estate, which should have been helping Native Hawaiians, was instead evicting them.

Gwen Kim, retired social work coordinator, said, "We were willing to die for what we believed."

She speaks of current situations, like with Mauna Kea and the Black Lives Matter movement.

"I feel almost as though we're at another stage that is quite similar to 50 years ago," she said.

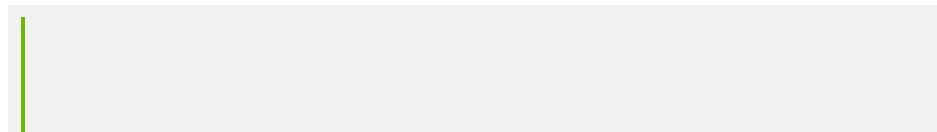
Former Honolulu Star- Advertiser reporter Gary Kubota was a conscientious objector and felt the need to support the Kalama Valley residents.

"We lost at Kalama Valley" but continued to help those evicted, he said. Kubota and others helped evicted pig farmer Santos by waking at 3 a.m. to help pick up slop in town when his farm was relocated to Pearl City, cook the slop and clean pens.

They managed to help several communities after that, including Ota Camp in Waipahu, living with the people, "to help humanize the situation, to give people hope and dignity and to respect minority cultures," Kubota said.

Songwriter Liko Martin played his guitar and harmonica and sang his composition "All Hawaii Stands Together." He said it was an emotional moment for him "to see all the faces." The event was held online via Zoom.

"Here we are, 50 years. Now we are at a new beginning. ... For the next 50 years, Kokua Hawaii is to bring Hawaii back to pono where all the people should live and appreciate each other and where we live. That's our task."



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