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Hale Mohalu verdict: 16 acquitted, 1 guilty

Sixteen people accused of obstructing the demolition of Hale Mohalu, the former state Hansen's disease facility, were acquitted yesterday. But another charged with trespass was found guilty.

District Court Judge Donald Low agreed with Reinhard Mohr, who defended six of the protesters, that the 16 had not obstructed demolition, since the bulldozer didn't start razing until the protesters were arrested, Mohr said.

But Mary Neilson, 56, who arrived late at Hale Mohalu that day and was charged with trespass, was found guilty.

Mohr said the judge mentioned her demeanor and that he couldn't believe some of the

things she said on the stand. She was fined \$20 and must do 20 hours of community service.

The group, part of the "Save Hale Mohalu" effort that was under way for five years, was arrested Sept. 21 after they refused to leave the ramshackle facility the state Department of Health was intent on demolishing.

Hale Mohalu's residents were officially moved to Leahi Hospital several years ago, but some refused to go. When state law enforcement officers, followed by bulldozers, moved into Hale Mohalu in September, there were only two men living there, Bernard Punikaja and Clarence Naia.

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