

Leasehold conversion idea called 'racist'

□ Bishop Estate recasts the issue to gain more attention

By Richard Borreca
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Peters yesterday said that one of leasehold conversion's strongest supporters, state Sen. Mary-Jane McMurdo, "should go back home where she came from because there is no room for her kind of racism here in Hawaii."

Last week, Peters referred to a pro-leasehold conversion group, the Hale Coalition, as the "haole coalition" — using the Hawaiian word for foreigner which is often used as slur for whites.

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"I don't know what people mean by that," Peters said. "Maybe I mispronounced it, I am not sure. The way they

pronounce it, it all sounds the same. If it is racist then so be it; it is their problem not mine. I didn't make these charges, she did — but I'm not backing off."

McMurdo said she also wasn't backing off and still believed Peters' remark was racist.

"I will stand on my good relationship with a number of very fine Hawaiian people, including a great many from his district. I think that man better pull in his horns," she said.

McMurdo, who lives in a leasehold condo that is not undergoing renegotiation, noted that Bishop Estate is aggressively using the issue of Hawaiian land rights in its fight to keep from being forced to convert their leasehold properties to fee simple.

"This is just about as subtle as a baseball bat on top of your head. This is what they use when they don't have any other arguments," she said.

But Peters said the leasehold conversion movement is in itself "racist" because it amounts to the forceful taking of land from Hawaiians.

"Whenever government steals from Hawaiians, they call it reforms. The leasehold reform is racist, it is stealing

from Hawaiians and Hawaiian institutions," said Peters.

Peters, who is also one of five trustees who control the vast Bishop Estate, Hawaii's largest private landowner, said McMurdo doesn't like the estate.

"Her problem is she is jealous that the estate is successful. If we were losing money, they would be walking over here patting us on the head and saying, 'Nice Hawaiian boy, we expected this of you.'"

The debate grew yesterday when Sen. Malama Solomon complained in a speech on the Senate floor that Bishop Estate clouded the issue of leasehold conversion by using the race issue.

"I feel compelled to speak because I am a native Hawaiian," she said. "Playing the racism card in this debate benefits neither the estate nor the community in which it will live after all this passes.

"I feel that this condominium reform bill is not a racial issue. Instead it is a constitutional issue as to whether or not a landowner has rights to his property or to her property and to do with as he or she wishes."

Another Bishop Estate trustee, Oswald Stender, first brought up the issue

when he wrote to the Legislature warning that land reform was directed against Hawaiians.

The Bishop Estate is generally composed of land owned by Hawaiian royalty, and proceeds from the land was dedicated for the education of Hawaiian children.

"Once again we find that land reform is inherently directed at divesting native Hawaiians of ownership, control of benefits in land; and seeks to re-distribute these rights to non-Hawaiians," Stender wrote.

Asked yesterday, Stender agreed that the debate was actually about property rights, obeying contracts and constitutional rights.

But, he added, he decided the Legislature was not paying attention to the debate in those terms and he decided to recast it as a struggle to preserve Hawaiian land.

"If nobody is paying attention to you, you better do something pretty drastic," he said. "If we need to use the Hawaiian land issue, which is a real issue that we have stayed away from because people get embarrassed by it, we will use that, too."

Study of nuclear power plant fizzles

By Richard Borreca

Star-Bulletin

Nuclear power plants found no fans at the state Legislature.

State Sen. Richard Matsuura, chairman of the Science, Technology and Economic Development Committee, on Wednesday killed a proposal to study the development of a nuclear power plant on Oahu.

Matsuura, who favors geothermal energy as a replacement for burning oil for energy, said nuclear energy was too polluting.

The nuclear energy proposal had been offered by Sen. Anthony Chang.

At a committee hearing Wednes-

day, a representative of the state administration also rejected the proposal.

Murry Towill, director of the Department of Business and Economic Development, said the proposal appears to endorse nuclear power as acceptable for Hawaii.

"Since there are many concerns about the technical and economic feasibility and environmental aspects of nuclear fission, we do not support this bill," he said.

Geothermal critics said Matsuura and Chang were using nuclear power to blackmail environmentalists into supporting geothermal projects on the Big Island.

The Big Island Rainforest Action Group, for instance, said the senators were using the bill as a way to win support for controversial geothermal drilling in the Wao Kele O Puna rain forest.

Nuclear power is dirty, dangerous and not economical, and attempts to force it upon the state will fail, said group spokeswoman Anne Wheelock.

"The myth of small-scale geothermal development for the Big Island falls flat in the face of the Chang-Matsuura blackmail proposal," Wheelock said.

Both senators denied the charge.

'Hawaiian immersion' idea may divide us

There is a matter barely before the Legislature this year — and so far little debated — that could have more lasting impact than hot issues like a Waikiki convention center or mass transit.

I speak of the "Hawaiian immersion program" now starting up in a few public schools.

Starting with kindergarten and so far up to fourth grade, students in the program get their instruction entirely in the Hawaiian language.

Early reports are that results are good ... that the students are stimulated and doing well and that their parents, too, are playing more active educational roles.

But where does this road lead us?

■ Is this a first step toward a separated society like that of the French in Canada, the Catholics in Northern Ireland or the Indians in Fiji ... with the same tinderbox potential?

■ Won't the Hawaiian speakers be isolated later on from equal opportunity in higher education and in employment.

The answer I have heard is that the Hawaiian-speaking students later on will study English as a second language.

Might it not be better to turn things around and put more emphasis on teaching Hawaiian as a second language? Couldn't that still achieve the goal of enhancing Hawaiian cultural pride and preserving the Hawaiian culture. (The Hawaiian-oriented Kamehameha Schools seem to think so.)

Here's what it says in section 1-13 of our state



HAWAII'S WORLD

By A.A. Smyser

laws: "English and Hawaiian are the official languages of Hawaii. Whenever there is found to exist any radical or irreconcilable difference between the English and Hawaiian version of any laws of the State, the English version shall be held binding. Hawaiian shall not be required for public acts and transactions."

That pretty clearly makes English the priority language.

Nationwide standardization on English has had a strong assimilating and "melting pot" effect. We unquestionably are a stronger, richer nation than if we had a conglomeration of state governments some conducting their business in English, some in French, some in German, some in Spanish, some in Italian, some in native American tongues and, perhaps later, some in Asian tongues?

If that were true we might be on the verge of breaking up, like the USSR, if we hadn't done it already. I don't think there would be many winners compared to today — not even among

native Americans or Hawaiians.

Others, of course, may disagree. But this is a topic we ought to have out in a major public debate before we allow it to more deeply affect the lives of not only students but the community at large.

The Legislature could get into the act if it wants to provide a forum because Hawaiian immersion may come before it as an item in the Department of Education budget ... if no other way.

Had we allowed early 20th-century families in Hawaii to educate their children only in their native tongues I doubt that Hiram Fong (Chinese), Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga (Japanese) and Daniel Akaka (Hawaiian) would have become U.S. senators — because Hawaii more likely would still be a territory or a commonwealth.

I, for one, would reject admission of Puerto Rico to the union as a Spanish-speaking state. If we want to take on economic basket cases we'd be better off picking up Canada's English-speaking Maritime Provinces if Quebec breaks up Canada and they ask to join the U.S.

Let's think long and hard before we go too far down the "Hawaiian immersion" road in our public schools.

We could be hurting the very people the program wants to help and the rest of the community, too.

A.A. Smyser is the Star-Bulletin's contributing editor.

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