

# Hayden and Puanani Burgess: Advocates for An Independent Hawaii

By LISA FOWLER

The mention of Statehood for most people conjures up proud and patriotic feelings, especially on this, the 25th anniversary. However, the mention of Statehood draws mixed reactions from some native Hawaiians. Many of them have gone from ecstatic jubilation and "dancing in the streets" to reflecting on exactly what kinds of changes have taken place and how the people of Hawaii have benefited or suffered from these changes. In 25 short years Hawaii has gone from a euphoric young state to one that is struggling to maintain individuality. Hayden Burgess, a trustee in the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) and advocate of Hawaiian sovereignty, says that through Hawaii's association with the United States it has become greatly dehumanized and that the United States has "forced their imposed mentality," on the people of Hawaii.

Burgess and his wife Puanani are quick to add that the term "people of Hawaii" includes all people of all ethnic groups, not just native Hawaiians. They both point out that the promises made in 1959 of a better life and a higher standard of living have not been realized.

"The whole idea of Statehood was a scam," says Burgess, "A new name for foreign oc-



Hayden and Puanani Burgess predict that Hawaii will be close to independence within 10 years.

cupation." He also says that we need to examine how Hawaii became a state in the first place, to realize the full impact it has had on Hawaii:

—In 1959, the people of Hawaii were given a vote that asked, "Do you want Hawaii to be admitted as a state immediately or not?" They were not given the choice of independence, Burgess stated.

—Who voted in the statehood election? The U.S. set up voting rules that said that anyone who had resided in Hawaii for at least one year could vote, which included many military and transmigratory people from the U.S. Because of the disproportionate amount of military personnel residing in the islands the vote was misrepresentative of the actual populous, according to Burgess.

Both of these factors, along with others, helped to create the 50th star on the American flag, Burgess stated.

Puanani Burgess says the biggest problem she sees with being a part of the United States is that they "urge us to believe in one universal truth, that you should come to view the world from just one perspective."

Burgess claims that Hawaii has not profited by Statehood, but rather has suffered. He says that having Washington governing Hawaii is impractical. "It's a continental mentality trying to rule an island environment. That mentality

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does not meet our needs." It is that "mentality" that Burgess says keeps us in "constant conflict." There has been a "loss of treasures" that belong to all the cultures that make up Hawaii, whether it is Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiian or whatever. "It's like substituting rock-n-roll for hula."

Burgess goes on to say that the people of Hawaii were "brainwashed" into accepting statehood through the use of propaganda by the U.S. government.

Burgess feels that autonomy is not only a realistic possibility for Hawaii, but necessary for the survival of the cultures that make Hawaii so unique. He also says that the government "tricks" local residents into accepting the military's presence in Hawaii by saying that they create jobs. However, Burgess believes a very small percentage of jobs

created by the military will go to local residents.

Burgess insists that the issue is not a racial one. "The people of the *aina*, not just the Hawaiians have the right to determine the destiny of Hawaii." People who have no loyalty to Hawaii are using us to further their own military and economic interests."

The situation is not unlike that of the original 13 colonies, says Burgess. The first American pioneers to come to the United States found themselves being ruled by a king thousands of miles away, which they thought was unfair. Now, we in Hawaii find ourselves ruled by a government 2,500 miles across the ocean and an additional 2,000 miles across the continent from us. "Those 13 disorganized colonies were willing to challenge the most powerful nation in the world at that time and they won," he points out.

Burgess realizes that the "general public is not ready for these kinds of thoughts." But little by little the issues connected with sovereignty are being raised. "Too many people feel 'we won't' right now," said Burgess. However, he predicts, "By 1993, we will be independent or harbor a very strong feeling toward it."

In fact, the issue of Hawaiian independence is a very controversial one today. Whether people are for, against, or indifferent to it, it is a question that cannot be ignored. Finally, Burgess says he is in the process of calling attention to the issue. "We have to get people from a position of not paying attention to one of support." Burgess sees his position in OHA as helpful, but just one step toward independence. "They think they can give you money in exchange for your spirit," he concluded. 