

A brighter day tomorrow?

Jim Dator
For the Departmental Symposium
October 27, 2006

As the announcements for this panel said, it was inspired by the fact that Ira and I discovered we fundamentally differed on the implications of the recent Akaka-Case primary election contest. After some bantering, we decided to take the discussion public as part of the departmental symposium series, on the assumption that a few, but not many, of our colleagues might be sufficiently interested in local politics to join in the discussion. We also decided to invite our local media star and well-known TV personality, Neal Milner, and to add Manfred Henningsen not only for comic relief but also both for his manifest interest in local politics and to provide a broader European perspective.

Here, briefly, is my position about Ed Case vs. Daniel Akaka and the broader issues behind it.

Ed Case was at best a Republican posing as a Democrat in a Democratic state. In spite of some satisfactory votes here and there, Case had a clearly rightwing voting record in Congress, and even while a local legislator. The age issue he harped on was clearly a red herring (as the selection of Cynthia Thielen as the Republican running against Akaka in the general election makes clear).

But in my judgment, Case was not even a Republican. He was just a political opportunist like Orson Swindle and others in the past who want power and do whatever they think will let them gain it. When they lose, as they fortunately have always done so far in Hawaii, they whine, complain, and call Hawaii's voters dumb for not falling for their ruse. True to form, now that Case has lost, he pouts and retreats, turning over his campaign office to Thielen while not doing what any other good Democrat would do (or should do)--fall in behind Akaka and strongly support him in the general election.

Akaka is not the greatest or even most effective politician Hawaii has ever sent to Congress (that would be Spark Matsunaga). And we do very seriously need to think about who will succeed both Akaka and Inouye. But, except for the Alaska oil-drilling vote, which he explains as loyalty to fellow indigenous people, Akaka's voting record is excellent. That a rightwing magazine declares him a bad politician is an endorsement and not a condemnation, in my view--and apparently in the view of many other voters in Hawaii.

Please understand that I want and work for new systems of governance that go well beyond the pallid non-democracy of all current systems, especially in Hawaii and the US, but also everywhere in the world. I have made that plain in several publications recently (for example, in an article in the *Advertiser* last month originally titled, "Don't Vote", and in a chapter titled "Will America ever become a democracy?" in a book titled *Democracy*

and Futures, also published last month in celebration of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in Finland, as well as in a lifetime of research and experimentation on electronic direct democracy--in all its many facets--for Mars as well as for Earth.

So it is strange for me to spend so much time worrying about who is running and elected in the present. But I do.

First of all my concern is that Akaka and other Hawaii Democrats, and similar Democrats elsewhere, are unchallengingly portrayed in the media as "radicals" while rightwing people like Case are portrayed as moderates.

I am also dismayed that people like Ira seem to believe that this is the way it is and that it is unchangeable; that we need to learn to live with this new political landscape in which what was the not-quite legitimate extreme rightwing position of a few years ago has become centrist now, not only shifting mild liberals to the far left, but also pushing social democrats, which is more or less what I am, off the screen entirely while moving bible-thumping, rights-denying, war-enjoying, money-stealing idiots--not to put too fine a point on it--onto the screen as "conservatives".

And I put the term "conservatives" in quotes because one of the other things that has happened over the last 25 years is an appropriation of the once honorable term, "conservative", by people who actually are fascists in belief and action. What are current conservatives conserving--except their own wealth and power at the expense of all humane and environmental values that true conservatives--and liberals--treasure?

I think I know how that shift happened--it was part of a very detailed plan by Newt Gingrich, conceived and begun in 1980, shortly after the election of Reagan to the presidency for the first time by which, Newt told me, he would make the Republican party the majority party for the rest of my life--a phrase that pierced my heart like an ice-cold dagger.

Manfred and perhaps some others will recall that I happened to be in Gingrich's office in DC the day before he was going to make that pitch to Reagan and the leadership of the Republican Party. He did a little run-through of his presentation for me and I was horrified beyond words. And yet I was also thunderstruck by the boldness, clarity, and level of detail of his vision. I came back to Hawaii the next day, and did a little departmental talk on what I had just heard.

Newt's vision seemed utterly ridiculous to all of us here at the time because the Democratic Party with its mild welfare state was firmly in control everywhere in the US, and the "Liberal Press" (meaning primarily the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the major TV networks) all determined the political debate and thus ruled the public's minds.

But Newt had a very clever and inspired plan for how to change all that--and did so as we can all now see. If anyone is interested, I can summarize Newt's plan later. But the point

is, it worked, and brought a new kind of religiously self-righteous and economically radical kind of Republican to the peak of power in the US, while moving the political landscape farther and farther to the fascist right while pushing the left entirely off the stage and the moderate left to the far left.

Ira thinks it will continue that way, if indeed it does not move farther to the right.

I acknowledge that is possible, even here in Hawaii primarily because of the huge and growing influx of people from the mainland and elsewhere who do not share the local experience and hence local values. But I think that in fact the winds are already blowing back towards liberal values again, and thus we should do everything possible to prevent people like Ed Case from being accepted as moderates.

We need to help the Democratic Party restore whatever timid liberalism it can, and stop being rightwing wannabes as most of them, including Bill Clinton and until his defeat, Al Gore, have been for the last few decades. And we also need to invent a new, improved, and futures-oriented social democracy--a direct, electronic, social democracy.

There is reason to be optimistic about that and to try to help the currents to continue to flow in that direction.

First of all, even in the darkest days there have always been a few Democrats in Congress and in Hawaii and in the nation at large who have stood up for liberal values. These people should be identified and lauded for their courage while the Democrats who supported Bush and fascism should be booted out.

And replaced by new Democrats. I don't know in detail about the mainland, but such new Democrats do exist here in Hawaii. Many of them ran for Case's vacated seat in the primary election, and proved themselves worthy of continued support.

Others also exist in the State Legislature. For example, most of the people in the Hawaii 2050 legislative caucus, who helped enact the Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Bill, are very definitely bright hopes for the future of Hawaii--and it is worth remembering that the State Legislature twice overturned Linda Lingle's veto of the 2050 Sustainability legislation, the last time unanimously in both Houses. There is real reason for hope here. I know that those legislators actively promoting the 2050 initiative are sincere and have values most of us here would find very much ours.

And finally, there are other future liberal Democrats and social democrats in our classrooms, seminars, and as aides and interns in the halls of government--and gathering and marching on the streets--even now.

Of course that is not enough from my point of view. We need fundamental structural change in governance. We need to have a structure of governance appropriate for the 21st and not still the old 18th Century invention, as is the case now.

But the time is not yet ripe for a national constitutional convention, nor perhaps even for a constitutional convention in Hawaii. If we were to have a national convention now, we would certainly end up with an even more structurally-oppressive and fascist government than we currently have. And that might be the case even here, until a little more time passes; liberal, social democratic, futures-oriented, feminist, Green, and Hawaiian political positions are reinvigorated; and a lot more thought and hard work is done.

But as the national consensus against the Iraq war; growing concerns about Peak Oil, sea level rise, and global warming; and the continuing rise to global power of China, India, Japan, the EU, the Islamic Ummah, and indigenous peoples all show: the winds of change are blowing in the right (that is to say, left) direction, and now is the right (that is to say, about) time for our Department to get in the boat and start , charting the course and setting the sails towards this potentially better future.

Certainly there be horrible faith-based neoliberal warmongering beasts in the water who seek to do us woe. And hurricanes blow while rogue waves surge.

But, comrades, there can and should be a brighter day tomorrow if we will but read the wind, grasp the rudder, pick up the paddles, set the sails, loosen the ropes, and boldly go.

Over to you, Ira.