We Are Chinatown, Third Arm and PACE

Pages 8-23

A: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 1/7/76
B: Undated, courtesy of May Lee
C: quote from Maxine Kahaulelio, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, date unknown
Introduction

In the late 1960s to mid 1980s, Hawaii’s Chinatown became entangled in intensive land struggles that in many ways mirror those that were being fought in various places throughout the islands. There was much participation in support of human rights during this time and many of the disputes and disagreements surrounded land possession and management. These struggles took place in areas that included Waihole-Waikane, Niumalu-Nawiliwili (Kauai), Ota camp, Hale Mohalu, He‘eia Kea, and Mokauea, among many others. As with these struggles, the Chinatown evictions involved numerous individual and communal actions in resistance to create a large and far-reaching impact. It is difficult to discuss every action taken, however I attempt to let the history speak for itself through the many publications by various newspapers, in addition to notes and written work from, and some discussion with, the organizers themselves.

Joy Wong introduced the Chinatown residents well in “Island Connections: Tenants on the Move” created by the Ethnic Studies Department of University of Hawaii at Manoa in 2012, saying; “A lot of them had been living in Chinatown for anywhere between twenty and thirty years. They were stevadors, they were retired workers from Pine and Sugar, and you know, they had helped Hawai‘i, the success of Hawaii’s economy, and all these corporations and banking institutions benefitted off the labor of these people. Yet here they were, in their retirement years, living in the community they had known for several decades, and were being pushed out of the community.” Earlier she had said “They had seen with urban renewal, back in the 50s. that a lot of people had been removed and the community was shrinking quite a bit .. and that basically profits, that developers could, with the assistance of city government, … pushing them out of their community, destroying their community, and they had no other choice but to stay and fight, so that’s what they did.”

A: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 1/7/76
B: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 7/18/77
C: Star Bulletin 8/17/79
According to the Third Arm newsletter published 8/6/71 (among other sources), Urban Renewal was first made into law in 1949. “The stated goal was to solve the housing shortage by removing slums and substandard housing, then creating decent housing. The Honolulu Redevelopment Agency (HRA), a department of the city government, is responsible for choosing neighborhoods they feel are “blighted” and decaying… they can qualify for federal money set aside for urban renewal…. The entire area (of Chinatown) is considered one in need of extensive rebuilding, in other words, a perfect candidate for urban renewal.

Once a place is picked for urban renewal, it’s physical conditions rapidly deteriorate… The government no longer tries to enforce building and housing codes and often cuts down on city services… The same is true for private owners… Since the building is going to be torn down anyway, why waste money on repairs and maintenance?”

A Star-Bulletin article published 3/6/80 stated that since 1974, the city had made plans to displace 27 families, 162 individuals, and 70 businesses. Robert C.Y. Lum, urban renewal specialist, said the City expected to evict the remaining 5 families, 30 individuals, and 40 businesses. For the Pauahi Urban Renewal Project alone, the Department of Housing and Community Development requested demolition permits for 24 structures, and 996 (out of 1400) faced eviction.

The Chinatown area consists of 36 Acres, or 15 blocks, and is bordered by Beretania, River, and Nuuanu Streets, and Nimitz Highway. According to a Third Arm report from July 1971, this area has an estimated 800 individuals, 230 families, and some 500 businesses. This is in close accordance with the 1970 census, discussed in a Third Arm “Working Together” (“WT”) newsletter January 1973, which puts the number of Chinatown residents at 1405. By June 1977, 15 families and 111 single persons had been relocated out of the Pauahi project area. Of these, only 2 families and 34 singles had secured housing within Chinatown, and 12 families and 57 singles remain to be relocated, according to an article in the Star Bulletin from 7/28/77. The Chinatown general renewal project would ultimately involve some 62.5 million federal dollars, according to “Another Voice” edited by Larry Jones and published 8/1/72.
According to a Third Arm “WT” newspaper article from September 1973, “Chinatown played a vital role in Hawaii’s labor history. After finishing labor contracts many dissatisfied plantation workers came to Chinatown to live. They were seeking a better way of life and Chinatown had opportunities for the small businessman. Aala Park was the center of many worker’s rallies where the people united in their struggles. This made Chinatown a busy and an important part of the local people.”

Due to low rental costs and low political attention residents aged living in deteriorating conditions. A City consultant’s study published in July, 1981, and discussed in the Star-Bulletin 3/20/82, found that the average rent in Chinatown was approximately $95 a month. That same article also states that outside of Chinatown there is virtually no housing at this price, and that vacancies in Chinatown are relatively low. This makes it very difficult for the residents to find adequate housing nearby.

Nearly all were living on very limited income (see A), so being evicted was a very serious predicament for them. Residents and workers not only feared their physical safety and security, but also the loss of their livelihoods and social relationships. Despite the terrible living conditions, many residents expressed appreciation for specific aspects of Chinatown living including vegetable gardens, chickens, pidgin coops, proximity to necessary stores and services, and many others. One Star-Bulletin article from 3/29/82 stated, “They are with people with whom they’ve spent much of their lives, and with whom they share basic life experiences like emigrating from the Philippines, working on the plantations and at Pearl Harbor. Chinatown has a street culture which its residents are comfortable with… Apartments and rooms are basic – nearly barren by middle and upper class standards – but most Chinatown people aren’t especially pretentious when it comes to material possessions. Besides, they spend a lot of time outside.

B: Honolulu Advertiser, 12/28/81.
C: Sunday Star-Bulletin and Adv, 1/10/82
D: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 1/7/76
Due to the island-wide land struggles mentioned briefly, there was much in way of organized support to aid in the protest of evictions in Chinatown. Many of these supporters are listed below, and include: Labor-Community Alliance (LCA), United Public Workers (UPW), International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU), Ethnic Studies dept at UHM, Waiahole-Waikane Community Association (WWCA), Kokua Hawaii, and Citizens Party.

The two organizations most directly and intimately involved in the Chinatown evictions were Third Arm and People Against Chinatown Evictions (PACE). These groups both fundamentally aimed to help the Chinatown community unite and stand up for themselves and one another, and fought persistently for the rights of the community, although in very different ways. Third Arm was originally formed during the time of the Vietnam war with alternative purposes, including resisting the draft, providing support for GI’s, and providing information regarding social security, welfare and health care. They quickly, however, learned of the imminent eviction threats and determined to focus on fighting for affordable housing for Hawaii’s low-moderate income population. According to Mary Choy in “Autobiography of Protest in Hawaii” and other sources, Third Arm evolved into People Against Chinatown Evictions (PACE), although the Third Arm Free Health Clinic continued to operate next door. It is the determination of these individuals that contributed significantly to the future low-income housing plans in the Chinatown and surrounding areas, thus providing a basic necessity that was otherwise falling behind in priority.
Interest Groups, as listed by Third Arm in a July 1971 Report:

1) Residents, 2) Business (large and small), 3) Property Owners (large and small), 4) Gamblers, 5) Mahus (homosexuals), 6) Drunks and Winos, 7) Patrons, Clientele and Regulars. "In the view of Third Arm as of this point, it is the residents who stand to lose or get f**ked the most; For them it is a natural happen-stance in their lives. Their loss is not only being forcibly moved from homes which some of them have inhabited for several decades but also more of the emotional trauma of being relocated and shoved about, never having the power and support or collective effort behind them to determine for themselves what happens to their lives."

A: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 1/21/76
B and C: Courtesy of May Lee
D: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 1/21/76
F: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 8/10/77
An additional threat to tenants that came years after the start of the Urban Renewal process was Historic Preservation. According to a Honolulu Star Bulletin article, “New tax incentives in the 1981 Economic Tax Recovery Act, signed by President Reagan in August, will have a tremendous impact on the building industry because tax credits now make it more profitable to renovate old buildings than to destroy them.” (1/22/82).

May Lee, of PACE, discussed in a Star-Bulletin article (2/23/82), that historical renovation projects and the publicity about recent tenement fires are prompting Chinatown landowners to evict their tenants. She pointed out that historical renovation is becoming increasingly profitable as a result of new federal tax policies at the same time that federal assistance for low-cost housing projects is being reduced. She told the City Council’s Downtown Task Force that nearly 50 evictions can be attributed to historical renovation projects, and that one downtown developer alone has been responsible for nearly 30 evictions from three buildings.
We Are Chinatown!

This section provides an introduction to some of the tenants who fought eviction in Chinatown during this time.

A: Rufino Ramos was a part-time yard man living at 1189 River Street with his wife Sortera and their two sons. Rufino was the first to protest the evictions, and persuaded his neighbors. He also became a PACE steering committee member. He suspected that the City wanted residents out not because of safety, but because the backbone of the Pauahi resident resistance would be broken. Information and photo A from the Honolulu Advertiser, 4/27/76.

B and C: Nina’s Café is owned and run by the large Cardenas family. Nina is from the Big Island, and her husband Petronilo (Pete) was born and raised in the Philippines. They had been in Chinatown for 21 years, having had to relocate already once before. They have eight children ranging in age from 3-24. Information and photos from “Working Together”, January 1973.

According to a well-written paper by Howard Wiig in April of 1978, “Personal recognition, even intimacy, in a swarming urban environment has earmarked Chinatown from the earliest days. This interaction tends to produce an intense, high-powered and dynamic atmosphere which renders the neighborhood a potent historical source…. ”. He goes on to say that Honolulu, then Kou, harbor had been previously two tiny clusters of humanity: fisherman in rude shacks perhaps where the Mindanao Pool Hall is now on River street, and a small group of priests living close to where Amfac Towers is now, tending an important Heiau that has since been supplanted by the Aloha Tower escalators.
Jose Vallejo is an unmarried Filipino man. He came to Hawaii in 1927 to work on the Plantations, and has lived in Chinatown since 1956. All of his family is still in the Philippines and he has never had a chance to return to visit. He spends a lot of time at the Cebu pool hall with his friends.

Damaso Cadalo is also a regular at the Cebu pool hall. He was born in the Philippines and has lived in Chinatown for over 30 years. He came to work on a plantation in 1920, but because he participated in the sugar workers strike, he was ineligible for his free trip home after 3 years. He too is single.

Cadalo and Vallejo are typical of the older Filipino men who make up more than half of Chinatown’s residents. Many go down to the pool hall everyday. A lot never play; they just watch and pass the time. Most are unmarried and live alone, the pool hall being their only place to go and talk story, day after day.

The above information is from “Faces of Chinatown” written by Arturo Wesley and published in February 1979.
Riverside Tailor Shop – Felipe Nieveras started the Tailor shop in the Fong building in 1949, after almost 20 years of plantation work on the Big Island, Maui, Lanai and Oahu. He moved locations twice, once for demolition and the second because of fire, and eventually found himself back in the Fong Building with Benita who had just come from the Philippines the year before in 1967. The Nieverases have a reputation in the community for good workmanship, honesty, and friendliness. They did not have plans if relocated. Photo A.

City Art Work – Mr and Mrs. John Lau owned and worked at the store, and helped Third Arm to print articles for circulation in the community. Their store specialized in photo equipment and supplies as well as studio work. John Lau started working there as a dark room assistant in 1938. By 1940, Lau and his wife took over the business. At this time it was located a few feet away from their current location, and his wife Edith kept the business going while Mr. Lau was employed at Bellows Airfield during the war years. Both John and Edith put in 10-11 hours a day of work, six days a week. The Lau family eventually decided to relocate. Mr. Lau’s health had been aggravated by City harassment.

B: Undated, courtesy of May Lee
- Written information from "Faces of Chinatown", written by Arturo Wesley, February 1979, and PACE Outreach Newsletter 2/20/80

Tax consultants: Manny Valin started his tax consulting business in the Fong building in 1974, after having lost two previous eviction fights. Twice he fought a legal battle against City and County to keep his Sunset Beach necklace business and his Waikiki table, representing himself, and both times he lost. Manny was a business school graduate from the Philippines, and was married with 3 children.

Cebu Pool Hall: Flora Libadizos owned the pool hall and lived upstairs with her daughter Suzette. Her other daughter Angie also assisted her from time to time. Mrs. Libadizos lived in Chinatown since 1958. Her husband owned the Cebu pool hall and she owned the restaurant next door. She originally had moved to Waimanalo, but found the country life too isolated.

Benny’s Tailor Shop: This was the smallest store in Chinatown, and was owned by Maria Gonzalez, in addition to the Cebu barbershop next door. Maria also sold fruit from her farm in Kahalu‘u, as well as other items and trinkets. She was born in the Philippines and came to Hawaii as a child with her parents who came to work in sugar cane. She first had a barbershop in Aala park, but was relocated.
Mildred’s of Hawaii – “Mildred Dohi has been running up the standard malihini muumuu and conventioneers aloha shirt for the past 25 years. Mildred’s earlier clients were a classier group of customers, many Nuuanu and Manoa valley ladies who ordered and-painted silk dinner dresses from her to wear to each others dinner parties. After seven or eight years, she went into mass produced sportswear, because she said that’s where the money was. Then she hired two designers, and began selling in the better dress department at the Liberty House.” Photo A. Published in the Star-Bulletin, 6/29/77.

B: quote from Hawaii Observer, 8/11/77.

Understanding Chinatown is accepting its paradoxes. In Chinatowns from Boston to Bangkok, the sublime coexists with the profane. Grinding poverty, sweat and despair compete with gaudy displays of wealth and waste. Even its name is a misnomer since 50 per cent of its residents are Filipino. (Twenty per cent are Chinese; ten per cent are Hawaiian; three per cent are Japanese; and 15 per cent are of other races.) The rent: The average 50-cents-per-square-foot monthly rent attracts the elderly pensioner stretching out his social security check as well as the sailor on the make. But the iron law of rent accounts for only part of residents’ and business people’s loyalty to the area; and—according to a City and County survey—fully 92 per cent of all residents polled wish to remain in Chinatown. “Their friends are here,” Dorothy Hoe of Catholic Social Services explains, “and there’s security for them here. The environment is congenial. It’s very important for them to know their way around especially if they’re half-blind. They don’t like isolation. If they walk down the street and need food, a friend gives it to them.” Hoe is talking about a Chinatown that Honolulu residents seldom see as they pass through the area on their way home from work or on a Sunday morning ride to Char Hung Sut’s for manapua. This is the Chinatown behind the sex shops and run-down bars, where narrow alleys lead to neat gardens, banana trees and cleanly-swept courtyards.
Charles Correa was of Portuguese decent, and was born and raised in Honolulu. He worked as a stevedor and fireman at Pearl Harbor and as a refuse collector for the city and county for 20 years. He had lived in Chinatown for 17 years, 14 at Pauahi Hale where he paid $60 a month in rent, and was an active member of the PACE steering Committee. Photo A.

Eileen Chinen owned the New Kukui Café on Beretania, between River and Maunakea streets. Her parents were from Okinawa and first started the restaurant on Kukui street in 1950. In 1960 they were given three months notice and they were forced to move. Now there is a mortuary there. She said they forced a lot of people out of business. In 1975 they were issued another eviction notice, but this time they decided to fight. “We don’t want to move until they can provide us with homes and businesses we can afford” she stated.

Pedro Quitevis lived at 4A N. Hotel Street and can be counted as a Chinatown resident representative from 1978. He emigrated from the Philippines and began working on the Honoka’a Sugar Plantation in 1928. After, he travelled interisland according to shifting demands of sugar and pineapple, but his work was interrupted by a long strike in the early 1930s. With the onset of WWII, he began work at Barber’s Point in 1941, then worked as a stevedor along the Honolulu Waterfront until the war ended and he was laid off. It was during his time as a stevedor that he became a Chinatown resident. He spent the rest of his working days at the Star Dust bowling alley and the Liberty House receiving department, retiring in 1975. Originally he had lived on Tin Pan Alley, near the Beretania Follies, until he and thousands of others were evicted around 1962 for the development Kukui Plaza. (Historic Hawaii News, Howard Wiig, May 1978). Photo B.

Charlie Miner had been married with one daughter before WWII. He was divorced shortly after returning, and that is when he moved into Chinatown. He worked with the ILWU as an organizer, and became a member of the Communist Party. He did end up accepting the City’s relocation money and moved, but not before contributing greatly to Third Arm and PACE. He is attributed with being a leader and getting Charley Correa involved with PACE. Photo C.

A: Undated, courtesy of John Witeck
C: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 12/20/77
D: Critics of redevelopment plans fear that communal style living favored by the residents will be lost if the old buildings are replaced by high-rises. Star-Bulletin, 7/28/77
According to a Third Arm Health Clinic Supplement to WT from April 1974, many of the Chinatown residents, particularly the elderly, were living off of especially low incomes (pensions, social security and/or welfare).

“Because of this, they often skip meals or eat starchy food like rice or bread that are cheaper but can fill them up. Needless to say.. not a good diet. There aren’t many job opportunities.. No job, no money…When people get sick and need a doctor, they don’t go because it costs too much.” This was the reasoning behind the start-up of the Third Arm Free Health Clinic and Community Center, to provide a range of dire services to the many residents of Chinatown. It is because of their financial situations that eviction posed such a large threat to individual, family and business well-being and security. Any increases in expenditures, such as higher rents, would greatly effect their daily lives.

A: Undated, courtesy of May Lee
B: Honolulu Star-Bulletin 7/19/77
C: Honolulu Star-Bulletin 8/10/77
D: Honolulu Star-Bulletin 8/10/77
In addition, “There are apothecaries, sundries shops, a coffee company, seed stores, and a variety of restaurants that draw a noontime crowd of salesmen, office workers, laborers, business and professional people. Although the notorious sex shops on Hotel Street are open, they are more or less ignored. The Oahu Market at Kekaulike and King, on the other hand, teems with morning shoppers”. (Star-Bulletin 8/10/77)
Third Arm

Third Arm was established in April of 1971. According to Third Arm notes, the organization was started by approximately 20, however other sources credit larger groups of up to 100, young University of Hawaii at Manoa students. The organization also consisted of community people and young professionals, such as school teachers, lawyers, and social workers. Many of the students had been involved in the Bachman Hall sit-in protesting the firing of Oliver Lee, the fight to maintain the Ethnic Studies Program, as well as many land struggles throughout the islands such as in Kalama Valley, and wished to continue their public activism. Those voted in as Third Arm organization officers, as published in “WT” 8/11/71, were Charlie Miner, Charley Hassard, Theone Wong, Lucy Willis, and Bill Medeiros.

Some credit must be given to Charlie Minor for repositioning the focus of Third Arm. In an article published in Workers Viewpoint in July 1982, Lillian Yamasaki describes his entrance into the storefront, questioning what the hell the activists were doing. He admitted there was a need for what they were already doing, but if they really wanted to help the people of Chinatown, they should help fight redevelopment.

A, B and C: “WT” 12/72 and 7/19/71 respectively
According to Third Arm newspapers and notes, the free Health Clinic was started alongside the Third Arm Organization and Community Center at 121-123 N. Pauahi Street in 1971. According to Mary Choy, her daughter, Diane, was among those students who organized Third Arm and was an active activist, and she enlisted the help of her father to open a Free Chinatown Medical Clinic. “It became the center for Third Arm activities, a walk-in clinic plus a center for political education. It was a stimulating experience for us. We had parties, fundraisers, potlucks, forums- Chinatown and the wide communities coming together as comrades” (“Autobiography of Protest in Hawaii”, p. 183). Third Arm members also realized that decent living conditions and healthy food would also promote good health. The Health Clinic offered free health care services on Friday nights from 7:30-9pm, and continued long after the evolution to PACE, eventually closing after 14 years of service.

A: Third Arm “WT”, December 1972
B and C: “WT”, January 1973
D and E: Courtesy of May Lee

Above: Marina tests Opu’s blood pressure. Other patients enjoy their wait in the newly enlarged waiting room, as is evident in other pictures shown on this page.
As quoted to the right, B, from a Third Arm report draft dated January 1973, the purpose of the community center was to unify the community and eventually form a representative organization for the people of Chinatown. According to Third Arm newsletters and notes, the community center was opened in July of 1971, was staffed and ran by university students, was open Mon-Sat 10-5, and as, mentioned, was located directly next door to the health clinic. In addition to the Community Center, Third Arm created a Co-op, creating and selling dustpans and toys among other items, with the aim of providing a profit that could be split between the members.

A: “WT” January 1973
E and F: Courtesy of May Lee
Third Arm contributed greatly in assisting Chinatown residents in numerous ways. In addition to the WT newspaper, the community health clinic, and the coop, their actions and programs included information sharing and assistance, food and clothing distribution, celebrations and excursions, petitions and brochures, a Hui Opio youth group, public meetings, forums and guest speakers, and even tours of the Chinatown area. They also did surveys and recorded the histories of ethnic working groups of Hawaii. Their tours were very informative and allowed for a personalized and detailed comprehension of Chinatown. According to Third Arm notes, some of the stops on the tour included Pauahi Hale, Komeya Apts, Shimaya Shoten, New Kukui Café, Maunakea Hale, Aloha Hotel, Nina’s Café, HRA office, the Open Market, and River Street Gardens (1189 River Street), described as the place where the first real community organizing began.
PACE was born out of Third Arm during vigorous protest in opposition to corrupt big business and in support of general human rights. According to a PACE brochure and as discussed in “Tenants on the Move”, the organization was created on July 19, 1975, and began with approximately 60 tenants, small business people and workers from different parts of Chinatown. Their message was a strong one, “People Not Profits”, and this along with many other slogans, including the popular, “People United will Never be Defeated”, were chanted loudly at many events. More about their aim and plan of action is discussed to the right, A.

The Aloha Hotel was one of the preliminary and notable eviction struggles. 13 residents faced and fought eviction for approximately 2 years, including PACE steering committee member Emile Makuakane. When eviction time finally came, PACE members and supporters occupied the rooming house for ten days. The City finally conceded and provided relocation at Maunakea Hale.

A: PACE Brochure, date unknown.
B: Although this quote is from a Third Arm Community Policy Report, the idea of the importance of community control was a fundamental guideline that extended through the evolution to PACE.
Joy Wong provides a great description about the political aspect of PACE’s actions in “Tenants on the Move”. She said, “I think the success of the Chinatown housing struggle was that it was a political fight, and that we realized that who we were facing was big business. Their only intention, their only need, was to make maximum profits. They had no interest at all in cleaning up the slums, they just wanted to destroy the community, to bring in supposedly “more prosperous” kinds of businesses, and residents. So I think identifying who we were up against and why was really important and that was how we developed a political fight”

Frustrations arose when residents were not awarded fair treatment and accused City officials of assisting developers, and the struggles intensified.

PACE members were also fueled by comments made by those who had been previously evicted in similar situations. Margaret Kiili, a Third Arm member, for example, was quoted in the Honolulu Advertiser on 2/22/72 saying, she had been displaced in the Kukui apartment redevelopment, and she “warned residents not to agree to any plans for their future unless it’s in black and white.”
PACE members were very strategic in determining their actions. Their tactics included sit-ins at the Mayor’s office, demonstrations at City Hall, picketing at the homes of landlords, as well as marches, sign-waving and chanting. They continued to provide tours and forums as Third Arm had, discussing the situation, and updated residents on the status of the evictions. When it became necessary, as mentioned, PACE members occupied buildings, such as the Aloha Hotel, depicted in photos C and D below, and 4A Hotel Street, during which time they lived and fought side by side with the tenants.

There were not only times of struggle, but also of celebration. Photo E shows the fourth anniversary celebration on Pauahi Street providing a stew and rice dinner and Jazz entertainment for the public and PACE members.

Also, to the right, B, is a clip from a PACE pamphlet from February 1980 describing clearly their understanding of the importance of unity as a strong weapon, that community effort is essential to the struggles against evictions, and that the City cannot always be trusted to adhere to promises made regarding low-moderate income housing provisions.

A: PACE undated brochure
C and D: Star-Bulletin, 7/16/77 and 7/19/77
E: Honolulu Advertiser, 7/29/79
The written notes, C and D to the left, supplied by John Witeck, provide an example of, and glimpse into, PACE’s process of planning. They first identified the issues and locations and their positions on the issues, then determined how to best approach them and who would take responsibility for the task. Their tactics were always non-violent, however they were aimed at exhibiting the strength and power of people united. They fought against some very powerful individuals, thus they weren’t always accepted kindly. Frank Fasi, Mayor of Honolulu at that time, for example, was quoted in the Honolulu Advertiser on 10/3/78 as calling PACE activists, “professional poor people” who were “unreasonable, insulting and demanding all at the same time”. Their relationships with political figures were very complex and quite difficult, with public officials often avoiding questioning and responsibility, and occasionally providing inaccurate or partial information, once they were able to be reached. Non-the-less, PACE succeeded in their mission of firmly grasping the attention of prominent political officials and steadily persisted productively in their struggles.

A: Sunday Star-Bulletin and Adv, 7/18/76
B: Courtesy of May Lee
E: Honolulu Advertiser, 4/15/76
At times the struggles against eviction became quite serious. In a few cases, activists, residents and supporters were arrested, although in many of the cases, such as with the “Chinatown 21” arrested for trespassing at the City Housing and Community Development Department’s site office on Smith street in March of 1978, the charges were dropped and those arrested were acquitted of the charges. There was even a case in which demolition began while residents remained in the building. Wayson Chow, a legal attorney for PACE from Legal Aid Society, in his chapter in “Autobiography of Protest in Hawaii”, stated that of their five court cases, two went up to the state supreme court, exhibiting the strength and impact of PACE’s efforts. “PACE and it’s supporters won all five court cases, and no one was ever evicted”, he declares.

A: Honolulu Advertiser, 7/19/77
B: Star-Bulletin, 7/12/77.
C: Honolulu Advertiser, 3/14/78
D: Star-Bulletin, date unknown
E: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 12/27/77
Wayson Chow continues in his chapter, “Our legal team successfully represented every Chinatown tenant, stopped every single tenant eviction, and helped encourage the city to build over five hundred affordable apartments in Chinatown into which displaced residents would relocate directly… After the Hawai‘i Supreme Court decisions overturned the Chinatown eviction orders, the city and private landlords became more cooperative in working with PACE. The nature of PACE has changed from stopping evictions to tenant governance and the preservation of the quality of life in Chinatown.” (p.44)

Joy Wong in “Tenants on the Move”, said “The success that PACE had had to do with being able to educate a broad sector of the community, and so yes, we had lots of support from labor, schools, university students, community groups, and churches… the Chinatown people realized that they had to just rely on themselves, it was people power, and in order to do that we had to organize not only our community, but the broader community as well.”

The marches, demonstrations, and overall eviction situation gained nationwide attention, landing Chinatown in newspapers such as the LA Times in August 1978, and the San Francisco Journal in August 1977. The San Francisco Journal discussed the Aloha Hotel evictions, and says that as of 1950, 1418 families, 1236 individuals and 505 businesses had been evicted due to “urban renewal”. It also asserted that in July 1977, “the city finally agreed to pass a resolution to stop all Chinatown evictions; work out with PACE a low-cost housing and store-front plan...; and provide acceptable relocation in Chinatown.”

A: PACE undated brochure
B: Honolulu Advertiser 5/4/76
C and D: Courtesy of May Lee
PACE celebrated its 6th anniversary around the same time the City committed to the Teddi Duncan Apartments, so named for Maarea Duncan, tenant of 4A N. Hotel street and active member of PACE. According to a PACE newsletter published Sept-Oct 1981, the building was dedicated on August 17, 1975, and was the first new housing built for Chinatown residents since the start of PACE. This was also the same year the new City administration recognized PACE as the Chinatown resident’s representative, and 30 of the 48 apartment units went to people connected with PACE. At the same time they also celebrated the City’s decision to renovate, rather than demolish, Pauahi Hale. Their celebration consisted of a slide show, tours of the housings, and speeches, in addition to the entertainment and refreshments.

The Smith-Beretania groundbreaking in 1982 also marked a big year for PACE and Chinatown residents. The City had made the decision to develop high-cost market condominiums at Smith Beretania, but PACE instead strongly urged City administration, in a struggle lasting 8 years, to dedicate the development to low and moderate income rentals. This had also already been promised to displaced residents of 1189 River Street a few years before, but they subsequently received notice that they were no longer eligible for relocation at that site. PACE created a petition and a Smith Beretania Coalition with the aim of gaining support for a resolution calling for subsidized rentals at Smith Beretania. They brought the petition-banner to Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) director Barry Chung. According to a PACE pamphlet from May-June 1980, tax records showed that public funds were used in 1920 to buy Smith Beretania and “that makes it public land and we have a right to decide how it should be used.” In addition to housing, a park and underground parking facility were developed, and can be seen there today.

A: title in Honolulu Advertiser 7/20/77
B: quote from Arlene Lum, Star-Bulletin, 7/28/77
C: Star-Bulletin, 4/20/77
D: undated PACE handout describing groundbreaking ceremony on 8/30/82
E: Sept-Oct 1981 PACE outreach newsletter
Davianna Alegado of PACE shared the concerns of many in stating, “It’s really the inaction on the part of the City that has frustrated us” (Star-Bulletin, 3/14/78). With the Smith-Beretania apartments, May Lee of PACE praised the efforts of Chinatown residents and Housing Director Joseph Conant, photo A, in finally getting the project off the drawing board (unknown source, 8/31/82).

Wayson Chow projects ahead in his thoughts of future land issues and offers some suggestions, “I think it becomes more difficult to organize against a landlord that does not have their main office in Hawaii…When your landlord is a multinational corporation with headquarters in Cleaveland, Ohio, how do you picket their headquarters? You can picket their Honolulu office….but it isn’t very effective. Activists need to become increasingly skilled in gathering information and finding systemic pressure points in the technological age….You have to encourage labor unions organizing in other lesser developed nations.” (Autobiography of Protest, pg. 47-48)

A: Honolulu Advertiser 2/20/81
B: City and County Brochure, 8/30/82
C: Star-Bulletin, 8/31/82
D: Honolulu Advertiser, 7/20/77
Mary Choy declared in “Autobiography of Protest in Hawaii” an underlying trouble of many, “it’s so sad to see how state power is used against the people rather than for them” (p. 184). It is, thus, very important that future generations believe in the power of the people and continue to exert themselves in political events and struggles to maintain a strong community voice, as these activists have done and continue to do. Wayson Chow points out, “We activists are hardworking, caring people willing to confront unscrupulous landlords and bureaucratic government officials who don’t seem to care about the average citizen.” He continues that many (often mothers) begin with the idea, “Let’s organize together for a more democratic, more humane, and more just society – a society where material goods are distributed on the basis of human needs.” (p. 49)

The quote below, D, from a Maryknoll priest published in the Honolulu Advertiser in 5/13/73, respectfully asserts a very important point, that the well-being of Chinatown residents and businesses reflects, as well as influences, the well-being of society as a whole, and thus it is in everyone’s best interest that it remain intact.

“I humbly submit to you that allowing the businesses and the residents to remain in Chinatown is primarily a moral consideration, touching on the basic human rights of residents to live, to carry on economic activity and to supply services to the community which no one else can supply. We of the whole community have large stakes in what happens to Chinatown residents and businesses. It is important that they be allowed to remain where they are now.”

EDWARD M. GERLOCK, MM
After-note

It was the aim of both myself and Hawaii People’s Fund to present the voices of the people living in Chinatown during this period of time, and those who aided and supported them, with reverence and respect in a truthful and clear manner. Through this brief article we provide an introductory glimpse into the sizeable evictions struggles that threatened the lives of many individuals, and pay tribute to all who fought in the struggle to maintain the security and comfort of our Chinatown residents.

In compiling research, as mentioned, I relied heavily on newspaper and magazine article clippings, pamphlets and brochure, as well as photographs among other resources, many of which were provided by participants, a substantial amount of whom also provided an interview which was transcribed and is provided separately. I must express my sincere gratitude to everyone who participated and aided in this project, specifically Sandy Yee, May Lee, Diane Fujimura, Merle Pak, John Witeck, Ibrahim Aoude, and Mari McCaig.

Sadly, many of the tenants have since passed, and it is a great loss that we are unable to document their perspectives and experiences. There is a wealth of knowledge that has passed on with those individuals; knowledge of the inner workings of Hawaii’s labor force and plantation industry, of the hidden sides of the military and port-life, and of the often overlooked character and cultural preservation ingrained in Hawaii’s Chinatown community. Unfortunately the scope and time frame of this project did not allow for an intensive detailing of all specific actions and individuals, however we aspire for this work to be further expanded upon in the future, and have knowledge of, and anticipate, an upcoming full composition on this subject by PACE members themselves.

The ultimate fundamental dilemma apparent in the struggles presented here is a substantial one. These Chinatown eviction struggles reflect struggles across the United States, and can be seen as a representation of the dynamic power relationship between the general public and those chosen to represent and govern them. The Chinatown residents and activists fighting eviction, through their statements and actions, showed they understood the importance of what they were fighting for and their character, enthusiasm, diligence and adaptability all guided them to a success in unearthing the improper actions and attitudes of Governmental representatives, and in achieving proper relocation provisions and situations for the displaced persons of Hawaii’s Chinatown. We thank them for their sincerity, dedication and hard work for Hawaii’s people.