

**Group 4 Reading: Guam Congress Walkout**

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**Quest for self-governance**

On 5 March 1949, the Guam Congress walked out as a protest against the US Naval Government and to underscore its quest for a measure of self-government and US citizenship. The protest drew nationwide attention through the press, and thereafter fairly quick action by the U.S. Congress and President Harry Truman.

Within two months of the walkout, Truman submitted a bill to Congress to transfer the administration of Guam from the Navy to the Department of the Interior. He soon after transmitted Bill H.R. 4499, Guam's draft organic act, that would give US citizenship to all the native inhabitants of Guam for the first time, and give the residents of Guam the greatest measure of self-government they had ever had in 300 years of colonial rule.

While the Guam Congress Walkout was only the culmination of five decades of local discontent with the status quo of naval rule, and was followed by a concerted effort by Chamorro leaders to get the US Congress to pass the Organic Act of Guam, the walkout nevertheless set in motion this momentous chain of events. It was the spark that was missing from the frustrating citizenship quest that had been led in previous decades by [Francisco B. Leon Guerrero](#), Baltazar J. Bordallo and others. The walkout was also the most openly rebellious act that Chamorros had committed against any of their colonial rulers since the Chamorro-Spanish wars in the late 1600s.

**Discontent with naval government**

The Guam Congress Walkout wasn't an event that sprung from the spontaneous feelings of the leaders of Guam in 1949. It was the climax of half a century of discontent among many Chamorros on Guam with their lack of self-government, lack of basic human rights and the denial of the dignity of US citizenship.

Under Spanish colonial rule, Chamorros eventually had some electoral participation in the various district governments on Guam. In 1898, when the Americans took over Guam during the Spanish-American war, Spanish officials were removed from the island and returned to the Philippines, leaving no one in charge. After various people decided they should be governor, local leaders formed a council who named a governor for Guam. He never actually led the island as an American ship arrived on Guam that same day and someone else was appointed governor. This body was eliminated under American naval rule.

From the beginning of the American governance of the island, the Chamorros expressed a desire to participate in government. In December 1901, thirty-two prominent citizens of Hagåtña sent a petition to the US Congress expressing happiness that Guam was now under the United States, but extreme dissatisfaction with being under military rule. Guam's citizens had "fewer permanent guarantees of liberty and property rights" under naval rule than under the Spanish, the petition said, and they respectfully asked for more democratic institutions.

A few months later, several Guam citizens petitioned for US citizenship for the first time. It wouldn't be until nearly fifty years later, however, that citizenship would be granted to the people of Guam.

The only participation in the government provided to the people of Guam came in the form of the Guam Congress. The first official Guam Congress, formed in 1917, was appointed by the governor and had no legislative powers. It was basically a formal advisory body to the naval governor, who could then follow the Congress' recommendations or ignore them.

The local leaders were very happy to finally be able to participate in the government, even if it was in a limited form, but they made it clear from the beginning that the most important issue to them was the question of Guam's political rights and a more democratic form of government under the United States. This first Guam Congress repeatedly passed resolutions calling for Guam's governor to petition the US Congress to deal definitively with the issue of Guam's civil status and political rights.

In the 1920s, the local leaders used a different tactic, petitioning for citizenship the various important officials who visited Guam, including senators, congressmen and high-ranking naval officials.

In the early 1930s, Governor William Bradley several times recommended in his reports to the Naval Department that federal legislation be enacted granting US citizenship to the Chamorro people. The Guam Congress unanimously endorsed his recommendations. Bradley further recommended that Washington grant a bill of rights to the Chamorro people, and instead of waiting for departmental approval, proclaimed a Bill of Rights for the people of Guam in 1930. As local interest in the appointed and powerless Guam Congress declined, Bradley also formed the second Guam Congress. It consisted of two houses – the House of Council and the House of Assembly – and its members for the first time were elected by the people of their districts. The first general election in the history of the island took place on March 7, 1931. However, although the people of Guam greatly appreciated being given the chance to elect their leaders, the second Guam Congress remained an advisory body. When it soon became clear that the recommendations of this Congress were to be as ignored as those of the previous Congress, interest by both the leadership and the citizens in participating severely declined.

In 1933, the Chamorro leadership organized an island-wide petition drive for U.S. citizenship that resulted in 1,965 signatures, but the U.S. Congress took no action on the petition. In 1937, the Guam Congress sent two official delegates, Baltazar J. Bordallo and Francisco B. Leon Guerrero, to Washington D.C. to transmit another petition for US citizenship. And while these delegates were able to get Congress to introduce and discuss a bill to grant such citizenship, official opposition by the Navy killed the bill.

After four decades of attempting to get the U.S. government to recognize their pleas for justice, their quest for citizenship, and their desire for a greater measure of participation in a truly democratic American form of government, the Chamorro people grew increasingly frustrated by the lack of any type of action.