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### African Agenda, August & September 1974

African American Solidarity Committee

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# AFRICAN AGENDA

A Voice Of Afro-American Opinion

Vol. 3, No. 5

August-September, 1974

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## Puerto Rico Is Our Fight Too

### Commentary

In the pages of the *African Agenda*, we have been a constant foe of United States imperialism and neo-colonialism in Africa and in other places around the world. There is no better case of the U.S. as a colonial and imperialist power than in the case of the special colonial relationship that exists between Puerto Rico and the U.S. government. Puerto Rico is a classical historical example of a colony raped of its culture and exploited by an imperialist power; in this case by the United States for the last 75 years.

Too often we in the U.S. neglect the fact that the struggle being waged by the Puerto Rican people for the independence of Puerto Rico from U.S. domination is an integral part of our struggle in this country. It is also an important part of the worldwide struggle against U.S. imperialism. Our failure to devote more attention and support to the fight for Puerto Rico's independence has been instigated in general by the existence of U.S. nationalism and chauvinism. This narrow and reactionary perspective often portrays so-called Puerto Rican "commonwealth" or "free associated state" as a tourist haven for fun and splendor, the "emerald of the Caribbean." To the contrary, the Puerto Rican people have historically struggled against foreign domination, against Spain in the past and, the United States more recently. Dr. Albizu Campos, Eugenio Maria de Hostos, and Ramon Betances are important Puerto Rican national figures who resisted U.S. domination.

Today, Puerto Rico is not a place for relaxation for the Puerto Rican workers. In fact, there is more than 30% unemployment. Prices are three times higher in Puerto Rico than in the U.S. and the Puerto Rican workers receive one third of the wage of U.S. workers. We in the U.S. face similar economic crisis and cannot afford to be a part of the U.S. colonialist plans to reduce the Puerto Rican workers

to modern day slaves for the U.S. monopolies.

Most of the two million Puerto Ricans who have been brought to this country as contract migrant laborers work in the fields/or in factories on the east coast. The movement of cheap labor between the metropolis and the colony is characteristic of colonialism. Puerto Ricans are brought to this country by the capitalists and are paid lower wages than Afro-Americans. The capitalist tool of racism is often used to divide Puerto Ricans along color lines because of their differences in skin color. Police repression is often enforced to pit Puerto Ricans against Blacks as in the recent case of police brutality in Newark, New Jersey.

For the Afro-American community, the island of Puerto Rico is an important and integral part of our history in this country. Puerto Rico was a slave port for our African ancestors before they were moved to the plantations in the North or Latin American countries. Historically we have not extended the hand of solidarity to the Puerto Rican people in our common struggle against monopoly capitalism. It is especially important that we unite with the Puerto Rican community here. United Afro-Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans and Asian Americans, victims of special oppression and exploitation can form a backbone of 45 million strong in the struggle against monopoly capitalism.

U.S. nationalism, the dominant attitude of Americans towards all other non-Americans, especially peoples of color, is counter-revolutionary. To fulfill our international and national duty in the struggle against imperialist exploitation, we must consciously counteract all forms of racism and chauvinism in our community.

In light of this background, the African American Solidarity Committee devotes

this issue of the *African Agenda* to the special colonial status of Puerto Rico and calls for the end of U.S. domination of the island. Concrete expression of solidarity with the people of Puerto Rico can be shown by supporting the Puerto Rican Solidarity Day Committee in its call for a national demonstration for Puerto Rico's independence to be held in Madison Square Garden in New York City on October 27, 1974. Your support is needed to make this the largest demonstration for the independence of Puerto Rico ever held in the United States. Extend your hand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters on the island of Puerto Rico.

PUERTO RICAN SOLIDARITY DAY

"FOR A BI-CENTENNIAL  
WITHOUT COLONIES"



The Puerto Rican Solidarity Day Committee has issued a call for a massive demonstration of support for the struggle of the Puerto Rican people for their independence in New York City, to be held on Oct. 27, 1974 at Madison Square Garden. For further information write to: The Puerto Rican Solidarity Day Committee, P.O.B. 319, Cooper Station N.Y.C. 10001. (212) 260-1290.

## Historical Outline Of Puerto Rico

In 1493 Christopher Columbus landed in Borinquen (Puerto Rico) and found 60,000 Tainos Indians on the island. The Spaniards were interested in the gold deposits of the island. By physical force and the use of Christianity which spread the myth that the Spaniards were gods, the Tainos people were forced to work the mines. The Indians did not take this oppression without resistance.

Under the leadership of chief Gueybana and chief Gurayoan armed revolts were launched. The Taino people were defeated by the superior arms and military tactics of the Spanish. In 1530 there were only one thousand Indians where there had been 60,000 Indians before the Spaniards came.

Despite this successful genocidal policy of the Spanish colonialists the Taino people left their imprint on Puerto Rico. Their culture and blood would join that of the African and Spanish to create a new people, the Puerto Rican people of today.

Slavery was first introduced to Puerto Rico in 1501, because the Indian was decreased the source of labor to mine gold on the island and slave labor became critical to the survival of the Spanish colony.

After Puerto Rico's gold was diminished, slave labor served as the backbone for the new sugar plantations. These sugar plantations were Crown Lands, that is land owned by the King of Spain. Puerto Rico played an important role with the rest of the Caribbean in the slave trade. It traded sugar and molasses for slaves which were then dispersed throughout the hemisphere.

Like the Tainos Indians, the African slaves resisted their oppressor; the first slave revolt took place in 1527, and continued until the abolition of slavery in 1873. Much is often made of the differences between slavery in the United States and slavery under Spanish colonialism. There were important differences, but everywhere chattel slavery was a horrible, brutal experience. Unlike the U.S. there was not a systematic attempt to destroy African culture and tradition. Thus the contribution of the slaves along with the Indian and Spanish contributions are indispensable to understanding the Puerto Rican culture.

### PROBLEMS OF SPANISH COLONIALISM

These differences in the slave system did not arise because of inherent differences between Englishmen and Spaniards. There were important differences between the economic base of the British and Spanish empires. Spain's

economy was mercantilist and based on the accumulation of gold through trade and plunder through its superior navy. But the Spanish empire was doomed to failure. The old feudal class in Spain maintained hegemony until the late 1800's and prevented the new capitalist bourgeoisie from coming to power. While the Spanish feudal class resisted their new capitalist class, the industrial revolution was taking place in England and spreading to other parts of Europe.

By the 1580's England was already challenging Spain's naval power on the seas. The wars that developed between Spain and England slowed down the development of Puerto Rico for almost one hundred years. Sugar production decreased and Spain viewed the island as merely a military base and not as a commercial enterprise. Large Spanish merchants were encouraged to go to other colonies and the island went through a period of economic neglect. The 1600's saw the development of small native born merchants who carried on illegal trade with the American colonies and the rest of the Caribbean. In the late 1600's the island was in danger of being depopulated and the governor asked Spain to ship settlers to the island.

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In the 1700's Spain introduced a number of economic reforms that laid the foundation for the Puerto Rican nation and its class structure. First, the crown lands were made more available for agricultural production. This was accomplished by dividing up the land used for grazing cattle. Secondly, sugar production increased and the refineries reopened. Thirdly, the Spanish crown encouraged the migration of Spanish settlers. And lastly, coffee was introduced as a major crop in the mountain regions. These reforms resulted in a tremendous growth of the Puerto Rican economy and population. In 1765 Puerto Rico had a population of 45,000, by 1800 it had jumped to 155,000 (of which approximately 30,000 were slaves). Sugar and coffee became the main cash crops with tobacco and molasses playing an important role. By the American revolution of 1776, an increase in trade relations developed between the U.S. and Puerto Rico and by the late 1800's the U.S. replaced Spain as the main nation trading with the island.

Despite these economic reforms production was based on the *hacienda* system with its semi-feudal relations of production. A class structure of the island began to crystalize, made up of Spanish citizens who completely served the in-



terest of the Spanish crown. Military leaders in the Spanish Army and their civilian administrators aided by the leadership of the clergy continued the day to day colonial administration of the island.

The biggest merchants were Spanish who did not reside on the island, but whose interest was in the continuation of Spanish rule. There were also a number of smaller merchants who grew out of the black market trade of Puerto Rico. These merchants were closely linked by trade (legal and illegal) to the U.S. The economic reforms of the 1700's crystalized this class who were Haitians and wealthy refugees from other South American revolutions; most were native Puerto Ricans and what is more important they were not Spanish. Their objective class interest was in political independence from Spain.

A growing class of intellectuals, doctors, and teachers greatly increased after the 1750's. They were primarily second and third generation Puerto Ricans and many were of mixed blood who often vacillated between reformism and revolution. Pinned in and restricted by Spanish and American colonialism and racism, they hesitated in accepting the leadership and hegemony of the working masses of Puerto Rico. This class would form the political parties of the 1870's and engage in lengthy debates on the legal status of Puerto Rico.

These economic reforms increasingly made the slave economy of 30,000 to 50,000 slaves a fetter to these new capitalist relations until the slaves were freed in 1873. The reforms also caused the development of a large number of moun-



tain jibaros, peasants, who became involved in semi-feudal relations with the large landowners in the mountains. Most of these peasants were engaged in the production of coffee working the land as sharecroppers although some owned small plots. This strata of the peasantry leaving the mountains to work for wages on the sugar plantations. By the 1800's the small working class, free workers or *jornalero* worked at the sugar plantations along with the slaves. They worked for a wage and, their movement was restricted to certain districts and they were forced to carry a passbook.

#### EL GRITO DE LARES

There were three political positions in Puerto Rico. First those who supported Spanish rule completely. Secondly, liberal reformist (autonomists) who called for some reforms in the relationship with Spain. Thirdly, the independista who called for a complete break with Spain. This last group called for armed revolt and saw themselves as part of the movement for liberation throughout the hemisphere.

Ramon Betances was one of the leaders of this latter group who organized underground cells throughout the island and then left to form an army outside of Puerto Rico. Ramon Betances and his army wanted to invade the island and then be joined by a general uprising. Their slogan was the abolition of slavery and the independence of Puerto Rico.

On September 23, 1868 a small band captured the town of Lares and proclaimed the Republic of Puerto Rico. However, this small group was cut off from support and was crushed by the Spanish army. El Grito de Lares became a symbol of the struggle for Puerto Rican independence, which did not go unnoticed by Spain. When it became clear to Spain that the struggle for independence was linked to the struggle for the abolition of slavery they finally abolished slavery in 1873.

Finally on Oct. 6, 1897 Spain granted "autonomy" and not independence to the island, which in fact was a greater control of internal policies by Spain. But this new position was short lived because on July 25, 1898, the U.S. marines invaded the island of Puerto Rico.

#### 1898 TO WORLD WAR TWO

Puerto Rico had long been in the plans of the U.S. imperialists who seized the island during the development of the U.S. as an imperialist power. After early ruthless expansion on the continent at the expense of the American Indians and Mexico the U.S. was in a position to expand abroad. They sought territorial

annexation of land in the Caribbean and the Pacific to secure their capital investments in those parts of the world. Sec. of State Blain said as early as 1876. "I believe there are three non-continental places of enough value to be taken by the United States. One is Hawaii; the others are Cuba and Puerto Rico." This expansion in the Pacific and the Caribbean was critical to the growth of U.S. capitalism. Leaders in the congress justified these annexations by the racist notions of "manifest destiny". Senator Beveridge once remarked, "We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustees under god, of the civilization of the world. God has not been preparing the English speaking and Teutonic peoples for thousands of years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation. No. He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples."

By 1900 the Foraker Act was passed which established a civilian administration on the island. All the laws of the U.S. including trade agreements were applied to the island. The Puerto Rican House of Delegates the only body elected by the people had no power to legislate. All laws and policies were made by the U.S. congress. The Jones Act of 1917 imposed U.S. citizenship on the Puerto Rican people. The Puerto Rican House of Delegates opposed this new law but they were ignored. The only rights accom-

panying U.S. citizenship was the right to be drafted and to serve and die in the U.S. army. These two acts established the legal superstructure that could facilitate the economic penetration of U.S. capital into the island.

Large companies bought land in Puerto Rico changing the economic unit from the hacienda to the plantation. The familiar scene of the destruction of indigenous agriculture to be replaced by a one crop economy took place in Puerto Rico. The island was forced to import much of its food from the U.S. at ridiculous prices and a large agricultural proletariat was created which worked for U.S. companies.

Since World War II we have seen a growth in the industries of Puerto Rico; and also a growth in the industrial proletariat of the island. For example, the petro-chemical industry has vast investments on the island, and U.S. corporations have plans to exploit the vast copper deposits of the island. At a time when large portions of the globe are breaking the chains of imperialism the U.S. is strengthening its control of the natural resources of Puerto Rico.

The military considers the island an essential base to maintaining U.S. control of the Caribbean and the entire hemisphere. The Navy's use of the small island of Culebra for target practice; wounding and killing its inhabitants is only the most barbaric example of the military concern for the Puerto Rican people.



## Puerto Rico: Special Colony of the U.S.

In recent years, the strength of the anti-imperialist forces of the world has grown by leaps and bounds. The African liberation movements, in particular, have contributed much to the decline of colonialism and imperialism. A year ago the peoples of Guinea-Bissau were being exploited by Portugal. But now after a long and difficult struggle they are under the rule of the P.A.I.G.C. (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde Islands). A few weeks ago the people of Mozambique were also a part of Portugal's faltering colonial empire. Today they are on the verge of independence under the leadership of Frelimo (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique.) Despite all of these gains, there are large areas of the world where people remain under the political as well as the economic subjugation of another people. On the African continent Namibia (Southwest Africa) is a de facto colony of South Africa while Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and South Africa are ruled by white minority governments. In the western hemisphere,

Puerto Rico is in fact still a colony of the United **Political Hold**

Although Puerto Rico has its own legislature, political power rests in the hands of the United States House Committee on Insular Affairs and the United States Senate Committee on Territorial and Insular Affairs. The United States Congress has the power to delegate and curtail the legislative authority of Puerto Rico. That body also has unrestricted power to extend the laws of the United States to Puerto Rico. Through various federal agencies, the United States Congress also controls Puerto Rican banking, trade, ports, mineral lands and mines, communications, salaries and labor legislation, monopolies and the power of taxation.

Even though Puerto Rico has no representative in either house of the United States legislature, this has not stopped the U.S. Government from exacting a "blood tax". Puerto Ricans have been drafted into the United States Arm-

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On August 14, 1974, the National American Socialist Committee held an interview with Juan Mari Bras, the General Secretary of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. The following article is part of that interview.

## The Time For Liberation

**AASC:** What are the different classes in Puerto Rico and what is their relationship to the struggle for national liberation?

**MARI BRAS:** The working class of Puerto Rico is the majority class. It includes more than 850,000 workers on the island, including industrial, commercial, and agricultural workers. There is a declining number of small farmers and a number of petty bourgeoisie which are the second largest class on the island. The petty bourgeoisie are very much suppressed in their economic activity by the American monopolies that have in great measure supplanted them from their economic activities, both industrial and commercial. We view them as an ally of the proletariat in the struggle for national liberation.

Then we have the intermediary bourgeoisie, composed of several thousand people in the high places of the corporations, government and armed forces who are the direct intermediaries of the American monopolies and the American power structure for the exploitation of the island. Rendering that service they have become beneficiaries of American intervention in Puerto Rico economically. They enjoy the affluency of the capitalist way of living and they unconditionally support U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico. They are a very small minority of the Puerto Rican population. But since they control the mass media and the whole superstructure of the colonial government, they have complete control of the lives of the Puerto Rican people in terms of serving the interest of the American monopolies.

**AASC:** Would you give a brief outline of the historical development of the struggle for independence in Puerto Rico and the events which led to the formation of the P.S.P. (Puerto Rican Socialist Party)?

**MARI BRAS:** Puerto Rico has been struggling for independence for more than a century. The struggle for independence of Cuba began around the same time as the Puerto Rican struggle in the 19th century. As a matter of fact, the first Republic of Puerto Rico was established several days before the first Republic of Cuba. On September 23, 1868 in the town of Lares, the republic was proclaimed by several hundred patriots who took the town and started the struggle for independence. On October 10th of the same year the first war of independence in Cuba began.

After the American invasion in 1898 many people belonging to the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie who were then beginning to crystallize as a class thought the

U.S. would bring liberty and freedom for them and wanted to back the American intervention in Puerto Rico. But another segment of that class which was economically very weak started a struggle against the U.S. but in a very timid fashion. But the process of monopolization of land by the sugar barons during the first three decades of the century brought about a change in the class composition on the island. An agricultural proletariat developed, the sugar cane workers, both in the face of production of sugar cane and in the industrial production of sugar. This was the basis of the development of the labor movement in Puerto Rico which was very active and faced a great deal of repression from the colonial authorities all throughout its years of the first and second decades of this century.

The 1929 depression in the U.S. was catastrophic on the island of Puerto Rico because all problems in the economy of the metropolitan country have greater repercussions in the colonial territory. By 1930 there was already a tradition of labor organization, working class consciousness and a tradition of patriotic struggle for independence.

Albizu Campos, a Puerto Rican lawyer who was a graduate of Harvard Law School in the U.S. and had gone back to the island, was the leader of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico in the 1930's. He was linked, while studying in the U.S., to the struggle for liberation of India and Ireland and was active in campus politics at Harvard during his student years. Both as a Puerto Rican and as a Black he suffered very directly the prejudices and discrimination of this society here in the U.S.

When he returned to Puerto Rico he started a new approach to the movement for the independence of Puerto Rico and he led the Nationalist Party. He was elected president of the party in 1930 after 3 years of touring Latin America, where he came in contact with progressive forces. He led the Puerto Rican people toward a frontal fight for independence. He advanced the theory of the inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people for independence.

He succeeded in mobilizing thousands of young Puerto Ricans in the struggle for independence during the 30's.

The labor movement which was traditionally oriented by syndicalists during the first decade of the century tried to present the U.S. as a progressive nation. Workers soon began to realize that the leadership of the labor movement was in alliance with the capitalists. They went to Albizu Campos because he was the only



national personality on the island that everybody knew was legitimately involved in the struggle for his people. They asked Albizu to lead the major strikes that were taking place in the sugar cane fields. Albizu began associating himself as a leader of the workers in the sugar cane fields. But Albizu was not trained in the science of Marxism-Leninism, and he was a nationalist, but well intended. The North Americans saw that Albizu was about to obtain the leadership of the working class and the people of Puerto Rico and they rushed to put him in jail.

In 1937 when the Nationalist movement was holding a parade in the city of Ponce, the second largest city on the island in protest of the incarceration of Albizu Campos, the police massacred 22 people! More than two hundred were wounded in what is called in Puerto Rican history the Ponce Massacre. The whole affair that had taken place was capitalized politically by some opportunists that organized and developed the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) after the leadership of the Nationalist Party was dismantled.

This party led by Luis Munoz Marin began their campaign of "bread, land and liberty" tried to bring together the aspirations of the social and economic and political needs of the workers of Puerto Rico. But, of course, they were reformists at the most and once they came into power in 1940 and tried to put into practice their programs of reforms, they were opposed. They were pressed by North American interests that were affected by those reforms and by the Congressional leaders in Washington and the power structure of the United States so they changed their policy completely. They started what they called the strategy of industrial development which was to attract industrial American capital on the basis of cheap labor, immunity from the organization of unions, tax exemption and several other privileges including technical assistance by the government.

This started the development of the industrial proletariat as a powerful class in

Puerto Rico. They tried to completely destroy the independence movement when the Nationalists after Albizu came out of jail, started organizing themselves for the second time. The PDP provoked the Nationalists by arresting the people that were escorting Albizu Campos one day. This precipitated the revolt of Jayuya in 1950 when the Nationalists tried to establish their republic for the second time in Puerto Rico. Jayuya is a town in the mountains on the island. They held the town for three days but were suppressed by the National Guard, the police and the Air National Guard that bombarded the town.

An Independence Party started which split from the Popular Democratic Party of Munoz Marin in protest of the change of policies in the PDP. It had developed to be the second largest party on the island in the elections of 1952 obtaining 126,000 votes and which represented the reformist independence movement. While the Nationalists were the revolutionaries, the Independence movement. While the Nationalists were the revolutionaries, the Independence Party were reformists. They considered that by going through the electoral process they could convince the American Congress to grant independence to Puerto Rico. But there was a great effort by all the combined forces of imperialism; the repressive agencies, the propaganda agencies, and several others, to destroy these two movements or organizations. By 1960, the Independence Party was practically destroyed and the Nationalist Party was absent from the life of Puerto Rico.

A new organization originated in January 1959. A couple of hundred people mostly young people from several places on the island met in Mayaguez, a western city. We came from different organizations; some from the Nationalist Party, others from the Independence Party, others from the small Communist Party that was active in Puerto Rico especially in the 1930's and '40s, and others were students from the University who had formed three years before the Federation for University Students for Independence.

All of us came together to form a new movement under the name of the Puerto Rico Pro-Independence Movement. We met in Mayaguez on January 11th and elected an organizing committee. That committee organized the whole island during the months of that year and in November we held the Constitutional Convention of the movement in Ponce and there formally established the movement on the basis of a very wide representation of all the tendencies within the independence movement. There was some

patriotic bourgeois including bankers and owners of newspapers, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Puerto Rico, and the most militant labor and student leaders. We tried to establish unity of the independent forces without having a vanguard of the independent people. In a couple of years we had learned by experience that that was is not possible. Unity is the result of a process and you have to organize the vanguard first and then strive for the unity of people that have contradictory interests.

We had the great influence of Marxist and Stalinist experience in those years especially with the Cuban revolution taking place a few hundred miles from Puerto Rico. We have always had a joint struggle in the past and what happens in Cuba has always influenced Puerto Rican policy. Cuba of course has had an influence everywhere in Latin America and in many other places in the world. But in Puerto Rico it had a marked influence during those years. The pro-independence movement developed from the concept of a large unitary organization of all the contradictory factions of the independence movement on the island to what we call a patriotic vanguard of the Puerto Rican people.

At the height of 1963, we went on the line of organizing vanguard people and developing an active and militant organization. We were everywhere on the island with different activities and actions, forcing issues to be debated publicly and raising the question of the complete absorption of the island by North American economic interests. We were the first to raise the issue of the mining in Puerto Rico. They (the U.S.) had always said that Puerto Rico didn't have any mineral resources. We obtained through sources in the government secret confidential papers that showed that Puerto Rico had great reserves of copper and several other minerals. We published that and developed a campaign against the exploitation of the copper mines by two North American companies (Kennicott and American Metal Climax) in what we denounced as the robbery of the century.

Then we developed a great massive movement against the draft. The Vietnam war was going on and the young people of Puerto Rico were forced to serve in the military service of the United States. We developed a great campaign that brought thousands of youngsters together who refused to enter into the army when they were called. Thousands of people in the celebration of El Grito de Lares burned their draft cards in the Plaza of the Revolution in Lares.

A couple of hundred persons were taken to be accused in the Federal court for refusal to join the military service, they

tried to follow the process, but the movement was so ample that nobody was convicted in all those years for military service refusal.

By the end of 1971, we were already prepared to proclaim the transformation of the MPI into the Socialist Part of Puerto Rico. We started organizing the party by designating the year 1972 as the year of organization for the party. We had great success in organizing the party in the industrial centers, and communities. By the end of the second year of existence of the party (1973) we had multiplied by six times the organizational basis of the party in reference to what we had at the moment of the transformation of the MPI into the Socialist Party. We are now striving to develop more the organizational basis of the party and the education of the working people in the science of socialism.

**AASC:** What do you consider the major tasks confronting the Puerto Rican community in the United States?

**MARI BRAS:** We believe that as part of the Puerto Rican nation, the Puerto Rican community has to share with us in the island the objective of liberation and the struggle for solutions of the great problems of Puerto Rico. At the same time as part of the exploited peoples in the U.S., we have to share with the rest of the exploited American people the struggle for liberation here within the United States. We consider ourselves as a frontier of the Third World in many respects. We are geographically and politically in the frontier between imperialism and the Third World. We are the only nation of Latin America that is directly governed by the United States. The Caribbean being such an important force in the equilibrium of the Americas, the meaning of Puerto Rico and of the major Antilles in general is very important for the imperialists. At the same time, it is important for Latin America. But in the same way as we are a frontier in that respect, referring specifically to the island, we are a frontier here within the United States. The Third World is living also within the United States. There are thirty million or so Black people in the United States who belong to the Third World. There are 15 million Mexicans that belong to the Third World and many native Americans that belong to the Third World. That is the world of the super-exploited people, the people who are fighting for freedom for their own share of the wealth of the world. It is an obligation of ours here in the United States to seek and achieve the alliance of the Puerto Rico peoples with the Black people, the Mexican people, the Indian people and all the super-exploited in the U.S. in order to bring about the basis for a real revolutionary process in the United States.

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## Puerto Rican Labor In The U.S.

The two million Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. comprise one of the most oppressed and discriminated national minorities in this society of capitalist and racist exploitation. Although Puerto Ricans have been migrating to the U.S. from the early 1900's there was no significant movement until the end of world War II, when the process of imperialist plunder of the island was greatly accelerated.

Over 40% of the Puerto Rican island's community have migrated to the U.S. in the last 25 years because of the economic conditions on the island. Operation Bootstraps provided the main impetus for the massive exodus of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. The essence of this economic program was to facilitate the penetration of U.S. capital, through a system of tax exemption that would provide U.S. industries a 10-17 year grace period. Cheap labor and the granting of generous subsidies by the Puerto Rican colonial government for the building of roads, electrical and physical facilities for factories etc. have attracted massive U.S. investments to the island.

This massive investment by the metropole in its colony has greatly accelerated the monopolization of the land. Because of the colonial status of Puerto Rico the U.S. has been able to flood the island with agricultural goods produced in the U.S. Puerto Rican agriculture cannot compete with these goods produced by advanced technology and is now on the verge of bankruptcy. The social result of this process of progressive deterioration of Puerto Rico's agriculture has led to the rapid ruin and proletarianization of the island's peasantry, small producers as well as agricultural workers. The peasantry has been forced to the urban slums of the island or to the ghettos of the U.S.

The population remaining on the island is faced with 30% permanent unemployment, 35% underemployment, and with an average industrial wage that is one-third of the wages of workers in the U.S. In addition the cost of living is 25-30% higher than in the U.S. The vast majority of the Puerto Rican people suffer extreme poverty (about one-third of the population receive food subsidies), inadequate housing, low-quality racist education, primitive medical services, and widespread social diseases, such as drug addiction (one of the highest rates in the world) and prostitution.

metropole is openly pushed by the colonial government and U.S. imperialism. These forces view the process as an escape valve to reduce social pressures resulting from the transformation taking place in the islands economy. But more than this, it is a systematic process for importing cheap labor to fill the marginal needs created by the technological and industrial developments of the U.S. This is necessary so that the working class as a whole can produce more profits for the ruling class of this country. This was duly noted by V. I. Lenin in his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* when he described migration from relatively backward, low wage countries to developed capitalist countries as a special feature of imperialism.



### Poor and Young

The Puerto Rican population in the U.S. share the same poor living and working conditions with other nationally oppressed people (Black, Chicano, Asian, Indian) who are the most super-exploited in this racist society. They suffer discrimination in all areas of life—social, economic, and political. More than one-third of the Puerto Rican population lives below the U.S. government established poverty line. This percentage is 3 to 4 times higher than that of White Americans. In New York alone some 50% of the Puerto Rican population receives some type of welfare.

There are already more than two million Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. mainly on the east coast, half of whom (1,125,000) live in New York City. Furthermore, it is estimated that 240,000 live in the state of New Jersey, 120,000 in Pennsylvania (100,000 in the city of Philadelphia), 110,000 in the state of Connecticut and 110,000 in

Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Nevertheless, there is also approximately 125,000 of whom live in Chicago and another 80,000 in other parts of the country. A significant aspect of the population in general is the fact that in practically every city where there are large concentrations of Puerto Ricans, there are also large Afro-American and/or Chicano populations.

The majority of the Puerto Ricans migrating to the U.S. are young, unskilled or semi-skilled workers from rural areas, generally coming directly from their rural hometowns to the U.S. without stopping in any Puerto Rican urban center. More than 66% of the migrants are under 25 years of age at their time of arrival.

The current population of Puerto Ricans in this country is noticeably young: 86% are under 40; 48.69% are 17 or younger; and 31.7% are 9 years old or younger. The median age is 19 years. The large majority of the population of working age is composed of what has come to be referred to as "first generations," that is, individuals who arrived in the U.S. as adults, or, at least as adolescents.

The majority of Puerto Ricans, particularly if they arrived in this country as adolescents or adults, "have plans" of returning to Puerto Rico, and see their uprooting as temporary. They come to seek an improvement in their economic situation so they can return to their country to live more comfortably. This phenomenon, which has been called the "myth of returning," obviously is in most cases not realized, but it permeates the whole community and helps to shape the vision that the community has of itself. In addition, many Puerto Ricans return to Puerto Rico (although not the majority), while many are continually arriving, establishing a constant renewal of the community, which helps to keep the national bonds strong.

### Super-Exploitation

Half of all Puerto Ricans who live in the U.S., that is, one million, are of working age. The rate of participation (persons of working age who are working or looking for employment) of this group in the work force, according to U.S. government statistics, is 560,000. Of the 420,000 (42% of all employable persons) who are not participating in the work force, 200,000 were mothers receiving welfare. This means that fully 45% of the potentially employable population are not being utilized, which is caused by the capitalist system's inability to provide full employment. Thus, it can be deduced that,

The migration of Puerto Ricans to the

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ed Forces to fight in every major war of this century. Thousands were killed in the Vietnam war alone. The United States Navy has also been given the privilege of conducting target practice on the island of Culebra. The inhabitants of this offshore possession of Puerto Rico face extinction. Some have lost their livelihood because frequent bombardments kill the fish in the neighboring waters. Others hit by Navy missiles, have lost their lives.

Puerto Rico is a military fortress which represents the counter-revolutionary bastion of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean. The island is the headquarters of the Strategic Air command of the U.S. in the Caribbean and provides training camps for mercenaries in anti-guerrilla tactics. These mercenaries have invaded in the past such fraternal countries as Guatemala, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

### Economic Submission

Ever since it gained hegemony over the island following the Spanish-American-Cuban War and pursuant to the 1898 Treaty of Paris, the United States has used its political dominance over the island to facilitate its economic penetration of Puerto Rico. When the United States took over Puerto Rico, the island's economy revolved around the production of coffee, sugar and tobacco. Forty-one percent of the arable land was devoted to coffee, 15 per cent to sugar cane, 1 per cent to tobacco and 32 per cent to foodstuffs. Ninety-three per cent of the cultivable land was owned by Puerto Ricans. Increased demand for sugar during World War I coupled with post-war shortages of this commodity prompted U.S. capital penetration of the Puerto Rican sugar industry, while the 1929 depression ruined indigenous producers. By 1930, 44 per cent of the cultivable land was allocated to sugar production. Sixty percent of all sugar production and 80 per cent of all tobacco production, was in the hands of four absentee corporations. The concentration of property in the agricultural sector of the Puerto Rican economy coincided with the advent of a cash-crop, monocultural, plantation type economy. The decrease in demand for coffee in the European markets along with the devaluation of the Puerto Rican peso (a consequence of U.S. occupation) displaced coffee plantation workers. They were forced to seek employment with the foreign magnates. These workers formed the nucleus of Puerto Rico's rural proletariat whose lifeline was the sugar factory. During the *zafra*, the time when sugar cane was harvested and processed, they worked. During the *tiempo muerto*,

literally the dead time; they were unemployed.

By 1940, the Puerto Rican economy was almost totally dependent on the world market price of sugar. The government of the Popular Democratic Party which was to remain in power for 28 years, borrowed heavily to finance an effort to reform the structure of the Puerto Rican economy. Having failed in its attempt to carry out an equitable redistribution of the land and to establish industries run by Puerto Ricans which were to provide jobs for the unemployed, the Puerto Rican Government decided to foster the industrialization of Puerto Rico by encouraging private and foreign investment in the island.

"Operation Bootstrap" offered tax exemption to foreign industries for a period of from 10 to 17 years despite the fact that the revenue was needed to defray the cost of public services. The government increased its liabilities by borrowing money to finance the construction of roads, buildings, electrical facilities, etc. for the benefit of incoming companies. Because the U.S. Puerto Rico's foreign relations, Puerto Rico was unable to negotiate loans with other countries or with international organizations at more favorable rates. Therefore, the island's government had to solicit loans from U.S. capitalists to finance these adventures. By 1965 the net external debt totaled 1.3 billion dollars. Forty five million dollars or 3.3 per cent of Puerto Rico's gross national product in 1965 was used in payment of the interest on the net external debt for that year. Ninety five per cent of the public debt of Puerto Rico is owed the United States and only 5 per cent is in the hands of local creditors.

Cheap labor was an equally important factor in Puerto Rico's industrial development. The lack of unionization and the large reserve army of labor insured the stability of the island's low wage scales. Approximately 19 per cent of Puerto Rico's workforce is unionized and one-third of that workforce is unemployed. Although the productivity of Puerto Rico, however, has become the fifth largest market for U.S. goods largely because the United States has need of a dumping ground for the sale of its surplus commodities. As U.S. businessmen make enormous profits in the re-export trade. The situation has worsened to such a degree that Puerto Rico, an island surrounded by some of the best fishing waters in the world, has not been allowed to maintain its own fishing fleet. As a result it has had to import 95 per cent of the fish consumed by its people.

the Puerto Rican worker has long been comparable to that of his or her U.S. counterpart, wages in Puerto Rico are

one-third what they are in the United States. Because of the productivity of the Puerto Rican worker, every dollar invested has brought a profit of 30 cents during the first year. For every dollar produced by Puerto Rico's industrial system, however, only 17 cents is left on the island. Thus it is not surprising that U.S. investments in Puerto Rico have become—after Venezuela—the highest in all of Latin America.

### Unemployment For Who?

A present day population growth rate in excess of 2 percent and the introduction of such capital intensive industries as the petroleum, petrochemical and pharmaceutical industries has exacerbated the problems caused by the *tiempo muerto*. The petroleum and petrochemical industries have employed only 8 percent of the jobs promised at the time they were established on the island. In complicity with the Puerto Rican government, the petroleum industry has been studying plans for the construction of a giant petroleum "Superport" on the offshore island of Mona. Its operation would inevitably pollute the waters around Mona and reek further havoc on the Puerto Rican fishing industry. The land area would cause additional loss of jobs for agricultural workers. It has been estimated that some 40,000 persons now employed by the agricultural and fishing industries will be put out of work. The completion of the "Superport" would create the possibilities of doubling the present U.S. investment in Puerto Rico.

The reserve army of labor has grown to such alarming proportions that the government of the Popular Democratic Party has taken steps to rid Puerto Rico of its unwanted population. The government instituted an extensive program of birth control and sterilization in which *one-third of the women of Puerto Rico have been sterilized*. In addition arrangements have been made with the U. S. government to set airfares from San Juan to New York at three weeks wages so that Puerto Rico's jobless can migrate to the cities of the United States in search of employment.

U.S. capitalists feel they must maintain control of Puerto Rico at all costs. Their long range plans for doing so are becoming clearer every day. The capitalists wish to turn the island into a military-industrial park with a small population of workers to keep the island going. An independent Puerto Rico would be a serious blow to U.S. and world imperialism; and so directly in the interest of the masses of working Americans. That is why all progressive peoples of this country have a responsibility to ACTIVELY struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico.

## Recommended Books

1. *Claridad*, published by the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP). Monthly newspaper in Spanish and English. \$5.00 per year. Claridad, 30 East 20th St., N.Y.C. 10003.
2. *Puerto Rico: a Socio-Historic Interpretation*, by Manuel Mallonalo-Denis, Vintage Press, \$2.40.
3. *We the Puerto Rican People*, by Juan Angel Silen, Modern Reader, \$1.75.
4. *Puerto Rican Papers* by Alfredo Lopes, Bobbs Merrill Press.
5. *Puerto Rico: Analysis of A Plebiscite* by Miguel D'Estefano, Imported Publications, \$1.25.

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Harold Rogers ..... Editor  
(continued from page 5)

A revolutionary process in the United States will mark undoubtedly a qualitative change in the world. It will be a tremendous step forward of humanity. It represents the very important objectives of the whole of humanity. So we view our task, our objective as Puerto Ricans as participating in the process of weakening imperialism and strengthening the forces that are beginning to organize against imperialism within the United States. That puts us in a very important spot and we try to act accordingly.

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although the government defines the official unemployment rate for Puerto Ricans as 11.5%, the accurate figure is around 30%.

Of all employed Puerto Ricans, some 93% are working class (58% industrial proletarian, 35% service and clerical). However it should be noted that the great majority of the proletariat is in light industry (commodity production of consumable goods; i.e., garment industry, novelty goods, shoe industry, etc.) That is to say that they are not concentrated in heavy industry (auto, steel, heavy machinery etc.) Although recent trends show growing numbers of Puerto Ricans in heavy industry.

Besides the large number of Puerto Rican workers who come to live in the cities of the U.S., there is an annual flow of migrant workers (about 50,000). Powerful U.S. farm owners, taking advantage of an increasing incidence of loss of land and job opportunities of the agricultural laborers in Puerto Rico, bring Puerto Rican migrant workers to North American farms to work during harvest season, through contracts made with the colonial government of Puerto Rico. These workers receive starvation level salaries, and live in work camps that are similar to concentration camps. The costs of transportation, food, and board, all of poor quality, are deducted from their salaries. In addition the migrant worker has no right to collective bargaining, and is denied all basic human rights. There is an increasing incidence of these workers to decide to stay in the U.S. and seek permanent employment. These workers live in extreme poverty in the small towns and cities throughout the east coast of this country.

The Puerto Rican woman is triply oppressed, as a Puerto Rican, as a woman, and as a worker. More than 340,000 women of working age are excluded from the salaried work force. They are victims of an inferior education in the colony as well as in the U.S., which encourages a negative, inferior self-image subordinated not only to the oppressor but to the Puerto Rican man as well. As a marginal worker, the Puerto Rican woman holds the worst paying, usually non-unionized jobs, such as operative and clerical. She is the "last hired, first fired," forced to enter the work force at low salaries and used as an instrument for keeping salaries at low levels for the entire working class.

Police brutality and political repres-

sion are an integral part of the everyday experience of the Puerto Rican community. The Puerto Rican community, like the Chicano, Indian, and the Afro-American receive daily dosages of numerous forms of repression and police brutality, as a constant reminder for them to "stay in their place." This repression takes on a more political nature with the arrest of radicals in the community. Examples of such cases are Carlos Feliciano, Eduardo "Pancho" Cruz, Jose "Che" Velasquez, Juan Otero, and Martin Sostre, to mention just a few of the latest ones.

Because of these conditions facing the Puerto Rican people in the U.S., objectively they along with the national minorities form the most advanced sections of the working class. The time is now for U.S. unions to call for the U.S. to end its colonial hold on Puerto Rico and to end the system of migrant labor.

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### U.S. Colonialism Exposed at the U.N.

The struggle at the U.S. by progressive countries and the Puerto Rican people to have Puerto Rico recognized as a colony of the U.S. dates back to the inception of the U.N. in 1945. Although the Puerto Rican anti-colonial forces were the first ones to raise this question at the UN, it has not yet been placed on the list of colonized territories.

The U.S. insists on obscuring the real status of Puerto Rico as a colony by referring to it as a "self-governing territory." This is a direct affront to the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination! The international body of the U.N. finally passed a resolution, in August 1972, for the development of a report on Puerto Rico to be presented to the Committee on Decolonization in August of 1973. The passing of this resolution was due primarily to the long and diligent efforts of the Cuban delegation to the U.N. and the representatives of the Puerto Rican liberation movement.

The resolution passed 104 to 5 with 10 abstentions. The five countries against the resolution were the United States, the United Kingdom, Portugal, South Africa and France. The Committee rejected attempts by the U.S. to denounce the report.

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