

THE FALLACY THAT PUERTO RICO BENEFITS

FROM U. S. CONTROL

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The issue of the struggles between the colonial liberation movements and the world imperialist powers was on the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations when it convened last October. What position would the United States take toward the South African resistance to the Malan dictatorship?

How could the U.S. maintain the friendship of her European allies and yet pretend to be the friend of the colonies they oppressed? Very simple! Just point to the relationship of the U.S. to Puerto Rico as proof of American "understanding" of colonial liberation struggles. Thus, Secretary of State Acheson stated in his address to the U.N. on October 16th, that: "Over 175 years ago the American people asserted their right to their own national life. Surely we can and do understand the similar aspirations of other people. Indeed, our record establishes this far more conclusively than any assertion I could make." Acheson was referring to the "new" status of Puerto Rico, to its "constitution." The New York Times of April 23, 1952 proudly proclaimed "...the proposed constitution as a model of government by the consent of the governed, the President also offered the new charter to a world menaced by Communist tyranny as an example of this country's adherence to the principles of self-determination, freedom and democracy."

With all the ballyhoo about the "Constitution" you would think that some major change took place between Puerto Rico and the U.S., yet Professor Pratt admits that "It would not alter Puerto Rico's territorial status or economic relationship to the United States...."(1) And if you were an American capitalist you too wouldn't want any change in the economic relationship considering that Puerto Rico represented a "1,000,000 a Day Market for American Goods," that Puerto Rico ranked 13 in world markets for U.S. exports in 1948, and "In terms of per capita trade, Puerto Rico ranks first in export trade of the United States...." (2)

To further "prove" how much Puerto Rico is benefiting from U.S. control the spokesmen for American imperialism point to the "great economic development" taking place on the Island. "Puerto Rico is entering a period of greatly stepped-up industrial and economic development with a minimum of 100 new plants expected to be established in 1953.....Plans now call for establishment of 100 to 150 new plants each year....bringing the total to 750 by 1960....A high level of employment is a key aim of industrialization. It is estimated that with each new factory opened, direct employment is created for 100 persons, and indirect employment for eighty more. There are 130,000 unemployed and 400,000 who are classed as partly employed (mostly the sugar workers who are unemployed 8 months during the year.- W.V.)" (3)

This article, although attempting to paint a good picture, only further exposes the farce of the "industrialization" program. They admit that each new plant built would furnish a total of 180 new jobs; they admit that they plan for a total of 750 new plants by 1960; they admit that they have a total of 530,000 unemployed and underemployed, yet they refuse to draw the conclusion that, according to their own figures, they need 2,944 new plants NOW to take care of the employment needs of Puerto Rico. They refuse to take into account

the fact that 15,000 persons enter the labor market each year, plus the fact that some of the plants opened recently are closing down, such as Textron Mills in Ponce, P.R.

While the U.S. government makes propaganda capital in the U.N. about Puerto Rico's "Constitution" it issues, a pamphlet called "Facts for Businessmen" which exploits the unemployment situation on the Island, for example: "Puerto Rico - U.S.A. A wise selection for industry....Provides Large Labor Reservoir expanding annually, from which new industrial firms normally receive 10 job applicants for each job vacancy". (4) In 1950 "Fortune" Magazine published an article entitled "Profit Hunters in Puerto Rico," which urged American businessmen to move their plants to Puerto Rico because wages were so low: "Here are samples: handicraft novelties, 15 cents (an hour); vegetable, fruit and juice canning, 16 cents; handsewn small leather goods, 17 cents; wearing apparel, 24 cents; textiles and textile products, 25 cents. Thus it is possible to report thatper capita income (corrected for price changes) rose from \$11 in 1940 to \$173 in 1946." (5)

And prices, contrary to popular conception, are higher in Puerto Rico than in the U.S., as revealed by Puerto Rico's Commissioner of Labor in 1949 when he reported that "increased prices averaging 25 per cent above those on the mainland....still loom as big labor problems." (6)

An example of the way the U.S. press deceives the American public regarding the true nature of conditions in Puerto Rico can be seen in a feature column "The Air World" by Gill Wilson of the December 26, 1950 issue of the Herald-Tribune as follows: "Aerial surveys show that more than half of the scandalous slums have disappeared and the remainder are being dealt with as far as possible." A week earlier an article appeared in the December 17 issue of the New York Times reporting the findings of the 47th annual convention of the Puerto Rican Medical Association. "About 95,000 families live in urban slums and their numbers are increasing (my emphasis, W.V.) rapidly as farmers move into the cities seeking employment." This means that over one-fifth of Puerto Rico's 450,000 families live in slums known to be among the worst in the world.

The same convention noted that "nearly one in each six families" required public relief and that "Those on public assistance received only \$7.50 a month regardless of the number in the family." Then along comes the Long Construction Company and places a half-page ad in the January 2, 1951 edition of the New York Times entitled: "Homes for 25,000 MORE People of Puerto Rico" which boasted that "The multi-story apartments, incidentally, will be well within the reach of the Island's wage-earners and salaried classes. They will rent for between \$75 and \$85 a month...."

Another one of the "benefits" of U.S. control is the American citizenship granted Puerto Ricans in 1917 - a scant month before America's entry into the first World War. Thus on October 6th, 1952 a CBS news broadcast announced that 138 of the 301 "recent American casualties in Korea were Puerto Ricans." This policy of using Puerto Ricans as cannon fodder was announced a few months after the outbreak of the Korean War when Brig. Gen. William Roberts stated on September 26, 1950 in Los Angeles: "It is my conviction that only as a last resort should white men (read Anglo-Saxon) be sent to Asia to fight. My observations in Korea indicate that we can use native troops with good effect. Maybe we could even use North Korean prisoners - just turn them around and make them fight the other way. And why could we not use Filipinos or Japanese?"

Among the other "blessings" of U.S. control has been the cultural suppression imposed intentionally as a weapon of American imperialism. This was brashly admitted by Theodore Roosevelt who stated that "After the Organic Act of 1900" was enacted, "the next step was the resolute attempt to stamp out local customs and culture and substitute English for Spanish." (7) Consequently, for the first fifty years of American occupation Puerto Rican students were forced to learn all their subjects in English. A few years ago, the Puerto Rican people won the right to use Spanish as the language of instruction in public schools.

The facts presented thus far have proved that the relation between the U.S. and Puerto Rico are far from the ideal "model colony" claimed by Acheson in his U.N. speech. All of Latin America sees in Puerto Rico's colonial status a threat to their own national interest. This is the reason why they supported and sympathized with the 1950 Nationalist-led revolt. This is why they supported the campaign to commute the death sentence of Collazo who attempted to kill President Truman. The Puerto Rican people have been struggling for the withdrawal of Puerto Rican troops from Korea, with the Independista and Communist parties active in this fight.

In 1948 the students of the University of Puerto Rico went on strike protesting a severe violation of their academic freedom. One of the student strike leaders, Helen Rodriguez Trias wrote of this strike in an article appearing in the Fall 1948 issue of New Foundations. The militancy of the strike and the methods used to crush it were revealed in the "History of Violations of the Civil Rights of Puerto Rican University Students" by Cruzada Universitaria which stated among the grievances, the following: ".....Second: The mobilization of the Insular Police and the National Guard to quell the students' strike. Third: The passing of Bills 23, 24, 25 (laws 53, 54, 55) by the Legislature, and their further signing by Governor Pinero.....These bills were passed in an all-night emergency session and were never submitted to a public hearing."

These laws, aptly termed the "Gag Laws", would sentence anyone advocating the "overthrow of the government" (this refers to the colonial government) or any of its dependencies (including the University Administration) to ten years in jail or a \$10,000 fine. Miss Rodriguez sounded a warning in 1948 to American students which pointed to the common danger faced by both Puerto Rican and U.S. students. "The students that were beaten and jailed for defending their democratic rights in my country by the lackeys of American imperialism yesterday, may be the students of your college tomorrow when you petition for freedom of speech or world peace. You, the students of the United States, must see that the Puerto Rican government and its University extension, the Administration, is controlled by the same imperialist forces that control your universities, and try to suppress your rights. The same forces that are aiming at the militarization and intellectual castration of the American youth are attempting to quell our struggle for independence."

This warning issued four years ago is indeed prophetic in light of present day McCarran attacks, dismissal of professors, and the outlawing of student organizations and their publications. The struggles of the students of Puerto Rico, together with the whole of the Puerto Rican people, for peace and independence is proof enough that Puerto Ricans have not benefited from United States control, even if the spokesmen of American imperialism pollute the air with such false claims.

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