PUERTO RICANS IN THE U.S.

The Struggle for Freedom
CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Perspectives of the Emerging Struggle of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. 9

Puerto Ricans in the U.S.: The Struggle for Freedom 23

Index 63
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Garza has been a bilingual teacher at Public School 25 in the Bronx, where he was chapter chairperson of the United Federation of Teachers. He organized support in the UFT for the struggle of Puerto Rican, Black, and Chinese parents for community control of the schools in District One on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He has also been a member of the National Maritime Union and the United Auto Workers.

His column, "La Lucha Puertorriqueña," appears in the weekly socialist newspaper, the Militant.
INTRODUCTION

Working people, especially Puerto Ricans, are threatened by the crisis of American capitalism. In fact, we stand to lose many of the rights and better living conditions that we, and those before us, fought so hard to win.

The Carter Democratic administration has left no doubt that it intends to continue the economic and government policies of its Republican predecessor. Layoffs, cutbacks, contrived shortages, sudden breakdowns—these are the promises that the president, and both capitalist parties, will make good on. Carter's "energy war" already proposes crushing taxes, soaring prices, plunder of the environment, and misery for millions of working people.

For Puerto Ricans, the situation is even worse. Language and race discrimination double the force of all the blows against our rights and living standards. The racist attitudes of this country's rulers can best be seen in the education, or lack of education, of our children. Instead of providing learning opportunities in both Spanish and English for Puerto Rican youth, the Democratic and Republican officials are cutting back bilingual programs and denying Spanish-speaking people their linguistic and cultural heritage.

In my 1977 campaign for mayor of New York City, where the crisis has hit with the greatest force, I've been a witness to the devastation of housing and social services in the South Bronx, East Harlem, the Lower East Side (where I live), and other barrios. The combination of employment discrimination and racist education has created the tragedy of thousands of unemployed youth—many of whom are driven to drug addiction. And the Democrats and Republicans here, just as everywhere else, offer only more of the same.

The scope of the crisis has attracted many Puerto Ricans to the idea of a fundamental change in society, the idea of socialism. The revolutions in Cuba and other semicolonial and colonial
countries, and the struggles of Blacks and Chicanos in this country, have shown that this idea is not only appealing, it is realistic and necessary.

But socialism is more than a good idea. Revolutionary socialists have to show that their ideas can be put into practice not only in the future, but now. What is needed is a program and strategy that can lead struggles today and that can eventually lead the fight for the establishment of a socialist government of the working people and tear down the last barriers to true liberation for Puerto Ricans.

The resolution and report in this book are a contribution to the discussion of program and strategy that is taking place among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. today. The resolution “Puerto Ricans in the U.S.: The Struggle for Freedom” was adopted at the August 1976 convention of the Socialist Workers Party, after several months of discussion open to the entire membership. It is a component of the general analysis and perspectives of the SWP as elaborated in Prospects for Socialism in America (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1976). The report was presented to the April 1976 meeting of the SWP National Committee.

These documents reflect the nearly forty years of experience of the SWP not only in the class struggle in this country, but throughout the world. One of the SWP’s biggest contributions to Marxism, which is fundamental to the analysis and perspectives here, is the understanding that Puerto Ricans are both an integral part of the working class in many major urban centers and an oppressed national minority with its own needs, demands, and struggles.

All strategies and perspectives for the Puerto Rican movement today will face the test of events as the capitalist crisis deepens. Revolutionary programs will be judged by how well they can advance the struggles of the day and prepare the next steps. The Socialist Workers Party welcomes this test. We are confident that the basic ideas and program in this book—developed through such experiences as the New York mayoral campaign this year, and in the socialist newspaper the Militant and the new Spanish-language Perspectiva Mundial—will prove effective in meeting the ruling class attacks.*

*The Militant is published weekly; trial subscriptions are available for $1 for 10 weeks; 14 Charles Lane, New York, NY 10014. Perspectiva Mundial comes out every two weeks; subscriptions are $10 for one year; P.O. Box 314, Village Station, New York, NY 10014.
Through our participation and in fraternal discussions with other activists we hope to enrich and further develop the program of action in this book, based on the real experiences of the struggle. The key test of the ideas here will be our ability to persuade Puerto Ricans to join the Socialist Workers Party, which has the perspective of becoming a mass revolutionary socialist party based on the working class.

To Puerto Rican militants searching for a program for socialism and liberation, I recommend reading and studying this book and giving serious consideration to joining the Socialist Workers Party.

Catarino Garza
May 1977
New York City memorial march for Pedro Albizu Campos, 1965

Scene at 1966 rebellion on Northwest Side of Chicago
For many years the Socialist Workers Party has participated in and supported struggles of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. We have fought for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners, to win support for Puerto Rico’s independence, for bilingual-bicultural education, for control by Puerto Rican parents of the schools in their communities, against police brutality, for affirmative action in employment, against discrimination in hiring and in layoffs, and against the forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women. We are now presenting the party with a codification of our experiences and our projections, the party’s first resolution on the struggle of Puerto Ricans in the United States and its relationship to making the American revolution.

We feel this is an important step for our party. It’s another sign that the Socialist Workers Party is seriously attempting to become the party of the working class, especially its most oppressed sectors.

Puerto Ricans are not only the most severely hit by unemployment but are disproportionately affected by cuts in education, health care, welfare, sanitation, and a host of other social services that are being slashed by the Democratic and Republican administrations. In addition to these problems, Puerto Ricans also suffer greater burdens than the working class as a whole by the mere fact that they are Puerto Ricans, that they speak a language different from English and come from a U.S. colony in the Caribbean.

In the past our general evaluation of the political situation in the U.S. and our class-struggle outlook have permitted us to
participate effectively in the Puerto Rican struggle. But the
development of the Puerto Rican movement, our increasing
participation in it and knowledge about it, and the beginnings of
Puerto Rican recruitment to the party have underlined the need
for a separate resolution on Puerto Ricans in the U.S. The work
done by the party in analyzing the Black struggle, first codified
in a resolution thirty-seven years ago, and our discussions about
the Chicano movement first presented as a resolution in 1971
helped prepare us in thinking through this resolution.

Before discussing some of the things that the resolution
attempts to accomplish I want to draw attention to what we have
not tried to do, to the limits of the resolution. The resolution deals
with Puerto Ricans in the U.S. only. The section dealing with the
U.S. relationship to Puerto Rico is only here to define the colonial
nature of this relationship, indicate the imperialist ruling class's
policies, and state clearly the responsibility of the U.S. working
class and the socialist movement to support self-determination
for Puerto Rico. We've also briefly indicated the conditions that
led to the massive migration to the U.S.

The task of preparing a resolution on the struggle in Puerto
Rico is the task of Trotskyists in Puerto Rico. For the first time
since the 1930s there is now a nucleus of comrades in Puerto Rico
organized in La Liga Internacionalista de los Trabajadores,
which publishes a bimonthly newspaper, *La Verdad.*

We do not share the outlook of the American ruling class that
decisions about Puerto Rico can be made in the colonizing nation.
As revolutionaries in the United States we think it is self-evident
that the colony and people of Puerto Rico by right should be free.
Based on the experience and traditions that go back to the
founders of scientific socialism we foresee that out of the struggle
to free Puerto Rico that country will develop its own leadership.
We have never had doubts about that, and the formation of the
Liga confirms our thinking.

The Socialist Workers Party desires to establish and develop
fraternal and collaborative relations with the leadership in
Puerto Rico, as we have with Trotskyists throughout the world.
We have learned that no leadership from abroad, no matter how
good its intentions, can substitute for an indigenous leadership

*La Verdad* subscriptions are $3.60 in the U.S.; Aptdo 22699 U.P.R., Río
Piedras, Puerto Rico 00931.
that is rooted in its own struggles. Only a movement standing on its own feet can win the confidence of the masses and lead them to victory. What we share with other Trotskyists throughout the world is a common program of uncompromising struggle against capitalism and against those tendencies that betray the aspirations of humanity to eradicate exploitation and to establish a socialist society.

The Resolution and the Party's Turn

The resolution we are presenting comes at a moment when the objective political situation in the country has led the party to make a turn towards deepening its roots in the struggles of the working class, especially the most oppressed layers. It comes at a time when we are rooting ourselves in the ghettos and the barrios and establishing branches in areas where we expect some of the fiercest struggles to emerge against the ruling class attempt to drive down the already miserable conditions of the most oppressed. We feel confident that these new branches will attract and win over the best of these fighters into our ranks. One example is the establishment of our branch in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City. That branch is the result of a struggle our comrades have participated in for many years over the right of parents to control the education of their children. Members of the SWP participated in that struggle, provided part of the leadership, and were a key factor in making the fight in District One one of the outstanding struggles in the recent past. The principal component in the coalition was the Puerto Rican parents. The ability of our comrades to relate to them and to prove to those parents that SWP members were consistent fighters provided us with the basis for our present expansion in that area. That experience enriches the resolution by permitting us to gauge the effectiveness of our politics in a concrete community struggle.

Another part of the resolution based on concrete struggles is on the campus struggles that took place in the late 1960s. The participation of comrades in the Young Socialist Alliance at the time helped us understand the dynamic of that struggle. It helped us appreciate how important the right to equal education is for Puerto Ricans and has influenced the present work of the YSA and the SWP in the fight against the ruling class drive to cut
back college education and destroy gains won during that period. It has enabled us to more correctly assess and get involved in the fight to preserve the only publicly funded bilingual college in the country, Hostos Community College in the South Bronx. Although it is one of the smallest schools in the City University of New York system, Hostos has waged one of the bitterest fights for survival.

In the field of employment the current offensive of the employing class has most seriously hurt the Puerto Rican community. A report by New York City’s Human Rights Commission, quoted in the April 15, 1976, *New York Times*, points out:

“Particularly hard hit by job losses were Hispanic employees . . . ; their numbers were reduced by 51.2 percent. Black employees lost 35 percent of their positions. . . . The net result of the separations was to decrease minority representation in the city work force by 4.5 percent while raising that of whites by 5.5 percent. . . . In the service/maintenance category, black males lost 54 percent of their number, Hispanic males 70 percent, and other minorities 35 percent.”

This report confirms what we have said all along about the racist nature of the cuts and reaffirms the position we took at the last party convention defending the affirmative action gains of minority workers and opposing all discriminatory layoffs. We plainly see how this applies to Puerto Rican workers particularly.

**Independence for Puerto Rico**

The resolution also reaffirms the importance we attach to the struggle for Puerto Rico’s independence and the position taken by the Fourth International in Trotsky’s time. We do not see support for the struggle for independence as solely the fight of Puerto Ricans. In the best traditions of international solidarity we understand that the working class in the colonizing nation must make the struggle against colonial rule an integral part of its demands. In that manner it also strengthens its own fight by defusing the weapon of “divide and rule” used by the ruling class against the oppressed.
Importance of the Resolution to the Party

We expect the resolution will help deepen understanding in the party as a whole about the Puerto Rican struggle. We know that the present draft of the resolution suffers from its New York City centricity. That’s to be expected at this stage, because that’s where most of our experience in the Puerto Rican struggle has occurred. But we hope that between now and the convention, the participation of comrades throughout the country in the discussion will help overcome this shortcoming. You can see from statistics presented in the resolution that Puerto Ricans can be found as far west as California. In Cleveland there’s a club named for my mother’s home town of San Lorenzo. The Chicago SWP is building a branch in one of the Puerto Rican areas in that city. In the Bronx, which has the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in New York City, the party just established a new branch.

Another task of the resolution is to further arm our comrades by clearly spelling out the party’s positions and perspectives on how we see the Puerto Rican struggle in the U.S. A clear presentation of our point of view can aid in winning over radicalizing Puerto Ricans. They will be able to compare our position to those of other tendencies and judge which one most clearly corresponds with the needs of the Puerto Rican struggle.

We will find radicalizing Puerto Ricans on college campuses and in the high schools; in the struggles of the communities; and at the workplace, in shops, hospitals, restaurants, etc. While most radicalizing Puerto Ricans are particularly concerned about the oppression of Puerto Ricans, many are also interested in our entire socialist program and our analysis of events in the national and international class struggle.

Although language is not the biggest barrier to gaining recruits at this time, it is a sign of the seriousness of our party that many comrades are learning Spanish. The fact that American comrades speak or understand Spanish can be a favorable factor in neighborhoods in which the majority of the population is Spanish-speaking. It shows the seriousness of the party when our members demonstrate that they are able to communicate in the language of an oppressed people.

Unfortunately we have not yet been able to put out a Spanish-language publication. It’s certainly not from lack of desire. The
problem has basically been one of assembling a large enough cadre of comrades who can write, edit, and proofread Spanish well enough to put out a professional publication worthy of our movement. Hopefully we can do this soon.

Bourgeois Influence

We cannot underestimate the influence of bourgeois ideology or the resources of the bourgeoisie within the Puerto Rican movement. A small but significant group was corrupted through the resources of the Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico during the 1950s. Some of today’s most prominent Puerto Ricans came through that school, a school shaped by Clarence Senior, former campaign manager for Norman Thomas’s Socialist Party presidential campaigns. Congressman Herman Badillo was groomed by a financial firm during that period. That generation was active in forming early Puerto Rican organizations like the Puerto Rican Forum, ASPIRA, the Puerto Rican Development Project, and other groups. These were forerunners of the numerous antipoverty agencies set up with federal funds by the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Their purpose was to derail the rising protest of the ghettos. Kennedy also viewed these programs as instruments for centralizing his control of the Democratic Party. Those programs succeeded in buying off a significant number of rebels and potential leaders.

Another bourgeois agency that has served as a conduit to the Democratic Party has been the Catholic church hierarchy. When many of its white parishioners left for the suburbs the church looked for a new base in New York City. This is probably also true in other cities with a large Hispanic population. It uses institutions like Fordham University to shape the thinking of Puerto Rican intellectuals, especially in the field of education. It used the Catholic University in Puerto Rico to train its priests to intervene in the Puerto Rican community. A measure of its influence in New York City is Father Gigante, who sits on the New York City Council “representing” part of the Puerto Rican community. In Chicago the church officials organized the equivalent of the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Saint John, to carry out their work in the Puerto Rican community. The Protestant churches, especially the Pentecostals, also play a conservatizing role but aren’t as centralized and therefore don’t
have the impact the Catholics do. With the severe cutbacks in public assistance for unemployed Puerto Ricans, many are forced to rely on religious charities—which reinforces these ties. The churches have not played a role similar to the one played by churches in the Black communities, where they sometimes become centers of protest and organizers of the community.

**Puerto Rican Socialist Party**

The resolution devotes quite a bit of attention to the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. It by no means exhausts what we know about this organization, nor all we hope to learn from the experience of comrades throughout the country. Its size, national character, and socialist philosophy makes it our most serious competitor, because it is capable of attracting radicalizing Puerto Ricans in the U.S.

The resolution attempts to indicate our general assessment of the PSP. We point out some of the difficulties in working with them in common actions. We want to emphasize, however, that we don’t consider it a finished organization, nor a clearly defined part of one of the main tendencies in the working class movement. Within its ranks there are diverse currents and viewpoints, and some members are open to Trotskyist ideas.

We helped build the Madison Square Garden rally for Puerto Rican independence in October 1974 that the PSP initiated, and have taken the initiative in New York City to join with them in actions to preserve Hostos Community College.

Our problem in these actions is their concept of how North American organizations should relate to them. When they organize a “coalition,” it appears participants are expected to accept their terms and direction. This usually means that they try to establish their role as the sole contact and representative of the Puerto Rican community.

However, it has not achieved that preeminence among Puerto Ricans, especially on questions relating to the class struggle in the U.S. In addition, its lack of clarity on the dynamics of the struggle in the U.S. imposes a narrow vision on actions it leads, and its sectarian posture hamstrings the potential of the Puerto Rican struggle in the U.S.

Their youth affiliate, the University Federation of Puerto Rican Socialists (FUSP), however, has tended to be less sectarian. It placed a representative on the steering committee of the National
Student Coalition Against Racism last fall (1975). However, since then they have not actively participated in building SCAR chapters. The FUSP has worked together on a few campuses with the YSA around the campaign to save Hostos. In a recent issue of the PSP newspaper, Claridad, the PSP came out against busing in Boston because it threatened bilingual programs in that city.

We should relate to the PSP's activities in support of Puerto Rican independence, check out local committees of the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee, and work with them in common actions wherever and whenever we can.

We should join with them in organizing defense activities for Puerto Rican victims of repression here and in Puerto Rico, as we have done in the past, including the case of the five Puerto Rican Nationalists who have been in U.S. jails for more than two decades. We should share our experiences with PSP members and learn from theirs. We should take the initiative to discuss political questions of national and international significance, for example: Portugal, Angola, the lessons of popular frontism in Chile, the character of Soviet and Chinese foreign policy, and defense of dissidents in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Maoists

The Chinese revolution made an impact on radicalizing Puerto Ricans as it also did on Blacks and Chicanos, and many Puerto Rican radicals identify with it. There are also a few small Maoist sects, all of which are smaller than the PSP. The most important one is the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRWO). The resolution indicates briefly the emergence of this group from what was originally the Young Lords Party in New York. In the Stalinist tradition the PRRWO uses physical violence against its opponents, including the SWP and YSA. Its influence on New York City campuses has waned considerably in the last couple of years, but wherever we confront them we must politically explain the basis of their gangster methods and minimize their influence even further.

Self-determination

As I pointed out earlier, we unconditionally support the right of Puerto Rico to be free and independent. However, that does not
answer the question about the future of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. We unconditionally support the right to self-determination of Puerto Ricans in this country, but it is still too soon to say what form this will take. The great migration of Puerto Ricans took place just over a generation ago. The majority of Puerto Rican heads of families in this country were born in Puerto Rico. Five percent of the Puerto Ricans in the colony were born here, that is, they returned to Puerto Rico along with their parents.

Another side in the development of the Puerto Rican community is that a growing number of young Puerto Ricans born and raised in the U.S. are adopting attitudes, mores, and viewpoints distinct from Puerto Ricans in the colony. Some refer to themselves as Riqueños or Niuyorriqueños in order to designate this distinction. They are not the majority but tend to reflect the feelings and problems of many young Puerto Ricans raised in this country.

The direction of Puerto Rican self-determination is not clear at this point. We can note that unlike Afro-Americans or Chicanos, whose long history in the U.S. has virtually eliminated the possibility of them, as oppressed peoples, choosing to return to Africa or Mexico, many Puerto Ricans consider Puerto Rico home. In our opinion, therefore, it is premature to rule out the possibility that masses of Puerto Ricans will return to Puerto Rico at some point.

The resolution attempts to describe the changes and trends of development among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. as accurately as possible, and we think it would be an error to close the door on future developments. We point out that the principal struggles of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are in response to their conditions here. In that sense they are part of the struggles of the American working class. The demand for bilingual-bicultural education, the growing pride in identifying with Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, is also an indication of growing nationalist consciousness. What is decisive are the concrete struggles taking place and how to relate to them.

The PSP and PRRWO, however, are involved in a sterile terminological debate over the national question. The PSP declares there is only one Puerto Rican people, who should belong to a single Puerto Rican party, whether they are involved in the struggle in Puerto Rico or in the U.S. This position minimizes the role of Puerto Ricans as part of the American working class. The PRRWO, on the other hand, basically excludes the possibility of
masses of Puerto Ricans choosing to return to Puerto Rico and rushes to the judgment that a new national grouping has emerged on American soil. They call for a multinational Maoist party.

Neither of these two organizations has elaborated a strategy of struggle to mobilize the Puerto Rican masses in the U.S. For us that is what is important. The living struggle will determine how Puerto Ricans will choose to exercise self-determination, and we pledge our support for that choice.

Independent Working Class Political Action

Two of the most important sections on the resolution take up the democratic right for equal representation and independent political action. The first deals with the long struggle of Puerto Ricans to be represented by Puerto Ricans in governing bodies. The second presents our strategy of independent working class political action and the relationship of the Puerto Rican struggle to it. Here we outline a few basic concepts that we've discussed many times before. They are:

1. In order to advance its goals and move toward replacing the capitalist rulers with a workers' government, the working class must break from support to and reliance on the capitalist parties, and chart a course toward a mass revolutionary socialist party.

2. The SWP, which represents the initial cadres and program of this party, is very small in size at this time, which means that in an upsurge the working class's first step toward a mass break from the capitalist parties may not be toward the SWP but through other forms—forms which could be steps toward building a mass revolutionary party.

3. Since 1938, following the organization of millions of workers into industrial unions, the SWP has recognized that this first step could be toward a party based on union power, i.e., a labor party, and we've advocated the formation of such a party. A labor party, based on the already existing union organizations and armed with a class-struggle program, would be a giant leap forward for the working class, especially its most oppressed sectors.

4. The rise of the Black movement in the 1960s, which developed in the absence of a labor radicalization and with little support from the labor movement, led some Black militants to raise the idea of an independent Black party and to take initiatives to form such a party. The SWP, which for a long time
had supported independent Black candidates on the basis of the democratic right to representation, welcomed this discussion and, in 1963, embraced this demand for an independent Black party which had arisen from the movement. Recognizing that Blacks are overwhelmingly proletarian, we saw that the formation of an independent Black party could be an important step toward independent working class political action and an important example for the labor movement. A similar development occurred in the Chicano movement in the early 1970s, which led to our support for an independent Chicano party.

5. Within this strategic framework of independent working class political action and support to the democratic right of representation, we urge Puerto Ricans to chart a course of independent mass political action and consider running candidates independent of the capitalist parties. So far, there have been very few examples of independent Puerto Rican candidates, only one that we can recall, and virtually no discussion of an independent Puerto Rican party, except, of course, as it's posed by the existence of the PSP, whose development still remains open. As the resolution indicates, we believe that breaking from supporting Democrats and running independent Puerto Rican candidates would be a big step forward. Whether activity for independent political action by Puerto Ricans will lead us to call for an independent Puerto Rican party is an open question.

Puerto Rican Democrats sitting in office offer no solution to the problems confronted. The type of candidates we call for are those that integrate the daily struggles of the oppressed with action in the legislature, or whatever office is held. Such a candidate, if elected, could defend the rights of Hispanics who are kept out of the electoral process because they are not citizens. In the resolution we point out how the ruling class pits "illegal" or undocumented workers against Hispanics with citizenship, so that both can be more thoroughly exploited.

Political action for Puerto Ricans is justified in many other ways. They are grossly underrepresented at all levels of government by dispersion throughout New York, in other states, and in the nation. Election districts are gerrymandered by bourgeois politicians. All Hispanics were undercounted by the 1970 census. The Voting Rights Act in 1965 required that in districts where 5 percent of the population spoke a language other than English, ballot and voting instructions must appear in the language of that minority. Some sources believe the undercount
of Hispanics was as high as 10 percent. In this 200th year after the American revolution, in which the grievance against taxation without representation played such an important role, we can see that the seeds of a new revolution are being planted by denying Puerto Ricans equal representation.

**Color Discrimination**

The resolution calls attention to another division that exists among Puerto Ricans, the color line. We call attention to it because it was ignored for so long in the Puerto Rican movement. It was felt, even among many radicals, that to speak of Black, mulatto, and white Puerto Ricans divided the struggle. That attitude is being overcome. Ignoring divisions brought about by a legacy of slavery and the influence of U.S. racism cannot help us. Only a thorough understanding of race prejudice can help eradicate its pernicious influence and its source, the capitalist system.

The resolution as presented marks an important step in the party's development. However, we don't look upon it as a finished document. It is now up to the members of the National Committee here to help refine it with your suggestions, experiences, and criticisms, before it goes to the membership.

In the preconvention discussion we expect that it will be further refined and improved. We expect comrades throughout the country will have contributions to make that will enrich it further. When the convention finally acts upon the resolution we expect that our first rounded statement on Puerto Ricans in the U.S. will prove a valuable tool in winning to our ranks the most advanced Puerto Ricans in the country.

They will be an integral part of the cadre we are assembling for the multinational revolutionary socialist party of all the exploited and oppressed in this country. This is the only kind of party capable of wrestling power from the arrogant rulers of this country and able to lead the third American revolution.
South Bronx housing project, New York City

New York City Puerto Rican Day Parade, 1976
Madison Square Garden rally for Puerto Rican Independence, 1974

“We Demand Bilingual Education”

“Bicentennial Without Colonies” demonstration in Philadelphia, July 4, 1976
I. Puerto Rico’s Relationship to the U.S.

Since 1898 Puerto Rico has been a direct colony of the United States. It was seized from the decayed Spanish empire at a time when the U.S. was emerging as a world imperialist power.

Puerto Rico’s relationship to the U.S., however, developed along somewhat different lines than that of the other booty of American imperialist conquest. Cuba was granted formal independence in 1898 but was a U.S. protectorate until the 1930s and remained a semicolonial until 1960, when the workers and peasants led by Fidel Castro established a workers’ state. The Philippines became formally independent in 1946 and since then has been tied to the U.S. in a semicolonial status.

Puerto Rico, however, after nearly eighty years remains subjugated to the U.S. in a direct colonial relationship. Although there have been several important changes in the legal relations between the U.S. and its island colony, none have fundamentally changed its colonial status.

In 1900 authority was transferred from the U.S. military to U.S. civilian governors appointed by the president, and a Puerto Rican legislature with limited powers was established. In 1917 Puerto Ricans were made U.S. citizens, primarily to provide cannon fodder for the U.S. Army. In 1948 Puerto Ricans were permitted to elect their own governor, and the present commonwealth status was imposed by Washington in 1952.
Following the nationalist agitation in Puerto Rico in the 1930s and 1940s and the worldwide colonial revolt after World War II, the commonwealth status was designed to give the appearance of greater autonomy for Puerto Rico. In reality it attempts to camouflage the true relationship between the U.S. and its colony and to improve Washington’s image internationally by hypocritically declaring that Puerto Rico is “self-governing” and “voluntarily” associated with the U.S.

In response to growing pro-independence sentiment and international pressure, the U.S. Congress is now discussing a recodification of the laws describing its colonial domination of the island. The proposed Compact of Permanent Union between Puerto Rico and the United States is simply an attempt to cover up the same colonial relationship with new legal language.

The compact would not recognize the sovereignty of the Puerto Rican people and their government. It would not permit the Puerto Rican legislature to have any control over such vital matters as foreign relations, immigration, customs, tariffs, monetary policy, postal service, or licensing of television and radio stations. These matters would remain the exclusive domain of the U.S. Congress.

Under the compact the commonwealth form of government would remain, but under the new name of Free Associated State, which is simply the English translation of its present Spanish name. Puerto Rico would still be under the thumb of most federal regulatory agencies, U.S. courts, and federal cops. The highest arbiter of the meaning and constitutionality of laws applying to Puerto Rico would remain the U.S. Supreme Court.

The primary purpose of the new relationship would be to grant the colonial government more flexibility to deal with union struggles. In addition, it would eliminate even the small benefits Puerto Rican workers receive from federal minimum wage standards.

Independence Struggle

At various times during the past seven decades there has been considerable support on the island for independence. In the 1930s and 1940s there was a mass independence movement in which the Nationalist Party led by Pedro Albizu Campos was the most prominent organization. One indication of the depth of pro-
Puerto Ricans in the U.S. 25

independence sentiment at that time was that the bourgeois liberal Popular Democratic Party felt pressure to include a plank in its program supporting independence. It later abandoned this position—which led to a split and the formation of the Puerto Rican Independence Party in 1948. In 1952 the PIP received the second highest number of votes in the elections.

There was a temporary ebb in pro-independence activity in the 1950s because of the improved economic situation and the McCarthyite witch-hunt, which was carried out more savagely in the colony than in the United States.

The colonial revolution, particularly the Cuban revolution, played a significant role in inspiring and ideologically influencing the reemergence of the independence movement in the 1960s. The formation in 1959 of the Pro-Independence Movement (MPI), which became the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in 1971, and its subsequent growth reflect the new sentiment.

An important aspect of the new independence movement, in which it differs from the movement of the 1930s and 1940s, is its attempt to link the struggle for independence with the social and economic struggles of the working class. This is accompanied by the acceptance of socialist ideas by many independentistas.

Testifying to the depth of this movement is the size of several pro-independence demonstrations in the past decade, including actions of 20,000 in Lares in 1968 and 80,000 in San Juan in 1971. The latter was the largest pro-independence action ever held in Puerto Rico. Recent struggles with a nationalist and pro-independence thrust include those against conscription into the U.S. Army to fight in Vietnam, against the navy's target practice on the island of Culebra, and against the construction by U.S. oil monopolies of an environment-devastating superport for mammoth oil tankers. The struggle against the draft was so popular that it became virtually impossible to prosecute all of the Puerto Rican youth who resisted conscription. In some towns the draft boards stopped functioning when the members resigned and replacements could not be found. In 1975 the U.S. Navy was finally forced to stop its target practice on Culebra.

The struggle for Puerto Rican independence has received considerable international attention. This has focused on the drive by the Cuban government, the Puerto Rican Independence Party, and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party to get the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a resolution clearly reaffirming the "inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to self-
determination and independence.” This resolution was adopted by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly in 1973 over the strenuous objection of the U.S. government, which denies that Puerto Rico is a colony. In 1953 Washington had pressured the United Nations into dropping the characterization of Puerto Rico as a “non-self-governing territory.”

Under both Democratic and Republican administrations, the U.S. government has ruthlessly attempted to suppress the decades-long fight for independence. Thousands have been jailed and scores shot down as the American capitalists have stubbornly resisted any move that would restrict their freedom to exploit the island’s natural resources and labor.

At present most of the U.S. ruling class and its agents in Puerto Rico favor the commonwealth status or modest modifications of it such as the Compact of Permanent Union.

The only major alternative proposed by sections of the ruling class is statehood. This is the position of the New Progressive Party in Puerto Rico, which has ties with the Republican Party in the U.S.

Statehood would not fundamentally alter the national oppression of Puerto Rico. It would simply be another form of maintaining the domination of the U.S. government and American capital over the island.

At its founding conference in 1938, the Fourth International declared that it stands for “the immediate and unconditional independence of Puerto Rico.” This remains the position of Trotskyists today.

The resurgence of the independence movement in the 1960s and its continued growth in the 1970s indicate that it was not an ephemeral phenomenon peculiar to the 1930s. Rather, this testifies to the deep historical, economic, and social roots of the independence movement and its permanent character as a significant and powerful force in Puerto Rican politics.

Revolutionary Marxists in the United States have the elementary obligation to oppose all aspects of colonial domination over Puerto Rico and to demand that Washington recognize Puerto Rico’s right to self-determination. We unconditionally support the demand for a free and independent Puerto Rico. While we believe that full national and social liberation can be achieved only through a socialist Puerto Rico, we do not make agreement with this position a condition for supporting the struggle of Puerto Ricans for independence.
American working people have no interests whatsoever in preserving the imperialist enslavement of Puerto Rico. On the contrary, breaking the chains that bind Puerto Rico would be a serious blow to the American capitalist class and a victory for U.S. labor.

The labor movement, under its present procapitalist leadership, has seriously defaulted by supporting the U.S. government's colonial policy rather than placing its considerable weight behind the struggle for Puerto Rican independence.

If the U.S. labor movement was led by a class-struggle leadership, it would be a powerful force in helping to put an end to the decades of colonial rule Puerto Rico has endured.

II. Puerto Ricans in the United States
Migration and Distribution

The massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States is rooted in the oppressive economic and social conditions imposed by Yankee imperialism. Puerto Ricans were dispossessed of their land by U.S. monopolies and transformed into a wage labor force suffering high unemployment and low wages. These conditions have driven hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans to leave their homeland and come to U.S. cities looking for jobs and better economic opportunities.

The rhythm of this migration is determined in large part by the economic situation in the U.S. The greatest number came during periods when unemployment in the U.S. was relatively low and job opportunities were greater.

A small number of Puerto Ricans migrated in the early decades of this century, including some who had served in the U.S. Army during World War I. The largest proportion went to New York City, but others were recruited to work on sugar plantations in Hawaii or cotton fields in Arizona. Migration on a really large scale, however, did not begin until the final years of World War II. In the last years of the war, the War Manpower Commission recruited thousands of Puerto Rican workers and brought them to the U.S. in army transports. When the war ended, daily air service and lower fares were established between San Juan and New York City to facilitate bringing more low-paid labor to the U.S. Many Puerto Rican workers were former GIs who had first come to the U.S. as soldiers.
The largest number of migrants came during the economic boom in the 1950s, when there was an annual average net increase of 41,000. The rate slowed down in the 1960s, and with the economic squeeze of the 1970s the number of Puerto Ricans coming to the U.S. has even been slightly smaller than the number returning to Puerto Rico.

Today, about two million Puerto Ricans live in the U.S., compared with fewer than sixty thousand in 1935. Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. represent more than one-third of all Puerto Rican people and are the third largest oppressed national grouping in the U.S. after Blacks and Chicanos.

Twenty-five years ago the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. was "El Barrio," or East Harlem, and only 20 percent lived outside of New York City. Today an archipelago of barrios has been created by the settlement of Puerto Ricans in other parts of New York City and in more cities throughout the country. Nearly 40 percent of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. now live outside of New York State. Ten percent live in Newark, Jersey City, Hoboken, Camden, and other New Jersey cities. Twenty percent live in six states—Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Illinois, California, and Florida. Fewer than 10 percent live in the other forty-two states and the District of Columbia.

Although Puerto Ricans are only about 1 percent of the U.S. population, their concentration in a few large cities gives them greater potential political and social weight than their numbers alone would indicate. Nearly 80 percent live in major cities, and they are significant minorities in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Newark. In New York, the country's largest city, Puerto Ricans are about 11 percent of the population, giving them a major role in coming social struggles.

The overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans in the United States are part of the working class. Severe discrimination in employment opportunities restricts most of them to low-paying menial jobs. By far the greatest number are employed in semiskilled jobs and as service workers and laborers. There are a sizable number of Puerto Rican steelworkers in cities like Buffalo and some auto workers in plants in the Midwest. Thousands, especially women, work in the garment industry in New York City. During the past decade a growing number of Puerto Rican women have also been employed as clerical workers.
The number of Puerto Rican state, county, and municipal employees grew with the increase in public employment in the 1950s and 1960s. This increase, however, was not as great proportionately as the increase in the Puerto Rican population as a whole.

Although the number of Puerto Ricans in white-collar and professional positions is increasing, this is still a very small percentage of the Puerto Rican work force.

Like other oppressed national groupings, Puerto Ricans are part of American capitalism's industrial reserve army. When there is a labor shortage employers hire from this pool of cheap labor. When production is cut back and layoffs occur, these workers are an easily identified layer and are among those fired first, with the acquiescence of many white workers. Many Puerto Ricans who received jobs in the past few years as a result of "affirmative action" plans are among the first to lose them with the cutbacks and layoffs. The existence of this reserve labor force helps the ruling class restrain wage increases and deepen divisions in the working class.

One result of the high unemployment rate is that many Puerto Rican families are forced onto welfare rolls. In 1970, even before the recent economic downturn, 24 percent of the Puerto Rican families were receiving some form of public assistance. The ruling class drive to slash even the inadequate public assistance programs, including welfare and child care, forces Puerto Ricans to seek aid from private charities, such as those of the reactionary Catholic church, and to make the family bear the burden for services that should be the publicly guaranteed right of all persons.

There is a thin stratum of small businesses owned by Puerto Ricans, especially barrio grocery stores, and a small layer of independently employed professionals. Together they form the main basis of the Puerto Rican petty bourgeoisie. There is no significant Puerto Rican bourgeoisie in the U.S.

National Oppression

Puerto Ricans migrating to the U.S. are part of a people who have suffered several centuries of national oppression under both Spanish and American rule. They come looking for better opportunities than are available to them in their superexploited
country. Because wage levels are higher in the U.S., many have found better-paying jobs than they had in Puerto Rico. However, there is no escape in the U.S. from national oppression and inequality. In many respects it is more intense because of the depth of racism and language discrimination. Racial and language characteristics are used by the capitalist ruling class to brand Puerto Ricans and restrict them to second-class status. They are discriminated against in all aspects of economic, political, and social life and segregated into hellish barrios. Thousands of youth soon despair of bettering their miserable situation and try to escape by using drugs.

The 1974-75 depression (which forced millions into the ranks of the unemployed) and the continuing ruling class offensive to drive down the living standards of the working class have heaped especially heavy burdens onto Puerto Ricans. And an even deeper crisis in Puerto Rico means that the thousands who return there every year are not finding any relief either.

Discrimination in employment means that the jobless rate among Puerto Ricans is at least twice that for the population as a whole.

In 1974 the median income for Puerto Ricans was an estimated 39 percent of the U.S. average, compared with 71 percent in 1959. The long-run trend is for the gap to widen.

Even when a job does not require complete proficiency in English, a Puerto Rican applicant with a heavy accent will often be turned away. And most civil service examinations are not given in Spanish, making it difficult for many Puerto Ricans to get government jobs.

The worst slum areas left by previous waves of immigrants have become the lodging places for Puerto Ricans. Some areas such as the South Bronx, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and parts of Brooklyn resemble bombed-out zones more than residential areas.

Apartment buildings have been put to the torch. In some cases this has been done by greedy landlords anxious to collect insurance and to divest themselves of the responsibility for maintaining them as dwellings fit for human habitation. Construction of new government-subsidized housing has not even kept up with the rate at which housing becomes unfit.

Cultural opportunities, recreational facilities for the young, and day care for infants are doled out with an eyedropper. Sanitation
services are minimal and garbage and glass on the streets are additional hazards to ghetto residents.

Racist judges and a scandalously inadequate number of Spanish-speaking interpreters weight the scales against Puerto Ricans in the courts. The proportion of Puerto Ricans in jail is far greater than their proportion of the population as a whole. High bail forces thousands of Puerto Rican youth, convicted of no crimes, to serve long terms in crowded detention centers while they wait for trial. Insufficient Spanish-speaking personnel and lack of Spanish-language books in the prisons further aggravate the generally inhumane and racist treatment that are part of prison life.

When Puerto Ricans seek escape by buying homes in better neighborhoods, they are often subjected to arson and bombing by racist vigilantes, as tragically shown in recent cases in Philadelphia and Boston.

The housing patterns also segregate Puerto Ricans into schools that receive less funding and are inferior to schools attended by most white students. This inequality in education is made worse by language discrimination. Tens of thousands of Puerto Rican children begin school with little or no knowledge of English. Many of them have transferred directly from schools in Puerto Rico. Very few teachers know Spanish, so that all instruction in arithmetic, geography, science, and so forth is conducted in English. The Spanish-speaking students, struggling to learn English, fall behind. Monolingual racist teachers call them "retarded." Many students give up and the "push out" rate is high, especially compared with the rate for white students. The problem is aggravated because there is only a handful of Puerto Rican teachers. Most teachers are racist in their attitudes toward Puerto Rican students and insensitive to their history, culture, and problems.

The courts have ruled that bilingual education is necessary to provide equal educational opportunities, and some bilingual programs have been established; but they are totally inadequate. And even these meager programs are now among the first targets of the ruling-class offensive to drive down living standards and cut back social services.

Language discrimination not only makes it difficult to get jobs or decent education, it pervades every aspect of social and political life. When a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican goes to a
welfare or unemployment office, hospital, library, or any other public facility, the chances are slim that there will be competent Spanish-speaking employees on hand to help. Until recently, participation in political life was restricted by English-only ballots and voting instructions; despite federal court rulings, racist gerrymandering continues.

Puerto Ricans are subjected to particularly barbaric treatment by the cops, courts, and prisons. While organized crime and the drug traffic operate under their benevolent eye, the police harass and murder Puerto Ricans. Even the mildest expression of Puerto Rican unity and cultural identity arouses the cops to frenzy, as shown in attacks on annual Puerto Rican Day parades and festivals in Newark, Boston, and other cities in the past few years.

Recently released documents on the government’s Cointelpro (“Counterintelligence Program”) operations confirm that Puerto Rican radical organizations are targets of harassment, frame-up, and deadly provocation by local red squads and the FBI. Grand jury “fishing expeditions” also victimize Puerto Rican militants by smearing them and throwing them in jail if they refuse to participate.

Racism

From its inception, U.S. imperialism has used racism to help justify the savage repression and superexploitation of the peoples in its colonies and semicolonies. Whether the inhabitants are Black, Brown, or Yellow, they are considered and treated as inferior.

Puerto Ricans are no exception. Although there is considerable diversity in color among Puerto Ricans, reflecting their Spanish, Indian, and African origins, all Puerto Ricans are considered racially inferior according to imperialist ideology and are therefore targets of racist indignity and injustice.

Race prejudice in Puerto Rico is not as intense or institutionalized as in the U.S. Many Puerto Ricans who in their country are considered white find that in the U.S. they are all “colored.” In the U.S. the racist mentality categorizes anyone vaguely associated with African, Asian, or Latin American descent as part of the colored world. Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are surrounded by a hostile society where racism is woven into every aspect of life. They are confronted by the fierce hatred spawned
by centuries of racial prejudice and are all “spiks” in the eyes of the ruling class.

One of the consequences of this racial oppression is that dark-skinned Puerto Ricans are particularly subjected to abuse and discrimination. It is even more difficult for them to find jobs and decent housing. Since the days of slavery, racist ideology in the U.S. has considered Black to be “bad and ugly,” and the blacker people are, the more inferior they are.

Women

Puerto Rican women suffer the added burden of sexual discrimination and abuse characteristic of capitalist society. They are especially the victims of the prejudices and traditions of machismo and the Catholic church.

Discrimination makes it more difficult for them to obtain decent jobs than either Puerto Rican men or white women, and their incomes are lower. This pressure is intensified by the fact that one-fifth of the Puerto Rican women over the age of fourteen in the U.S. head households and are the principal breadwinners for their families.

The problems of working and maintaining families are compounded by the obstacles placed in the way of economic independence. Child-care facilities, already too expensive and inadequate, are being cut back. And the right to choose whether or not to have a child is far from being won. Despite the 1970 repeal of the New York State law restricting abortions and the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortions, there are still numerous barriers—especially the expense—to obtaining them. Furthermore, reactionary forces are trying to roll back the gains that have been won by imposing more and more restrictions on the right to abortion. Puerto Rican women are especially affected by these barriers and attacks, because the greatest increase in the number of abortions in New York City in the past five years has been among Puerto Rican women.

The right of Puerto Rican women to choose whether to have children is also violated by the large number of forced sterilizations. In 1972-73 there was a 180 percent rise in the number of sterilizations performed in New York City hospitals that service predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhoods. Racist hospital administrators and doctors who want to help limit the growth of
the Puerto Rican population use subterfuge and blackmail to force sterilization on Puerto Rican women. Many hospitals also force hysterectomies on women who don’t need them in order to provide practice for interns.

Oppressed as part of the working class, as a national minority, and as women, Puerto Rican women today have a special stake in fighting for the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA, if ratified, would be a weapon in the hands of women in much the same way as the 1974 Supreme Court decision declaring the right of Spanish-speaking students to an equal education is a weapon in the hands of the Puerto Rican community.

Women are the principal organizers and activists of many struggles demanding child care, housing, and education in the Puerto Rican community, and there is a growing acceptance of feminist ideas among them.

The Puerto Rican Movement

A radicalization of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. began in the late 1960s and continues today. It developed in response to the miserable conditions in which Puerto Ricans are forced to live and was inspired by the explosive rise of the civil rights movement, the development of Black nationalism, the rise of the mass anti-Vietnam War movement, and the political radicalization in Puerto Rico. While this radicalization’s impact has been primarily on youth, it has reached all layers of the Puerto Rican population and has established itself as an important part of the class struggle in the U.S. It has been a catalyst for a wide range of struggles and has led to the birth of new organizations that are demanding a better life immediately, not four or five generations from now.

The new pride and self-confidence of Puerto Rican nationalism has led to more radical methods of struggle and radical ideas about society. Among a small but growing number there is increasing interest in and acceptance of socialist ideas. The scope and militancy of this radicalization can best be appreciated by tracing some of the earlier history of the Puerto Rican movement in the U.S.

The principal radical organization of Puerto Ricans during the 1930s was the Nationalist Party, which was based in Puerto Rico and maintained a branch in New York City. Its main work was
the organization of support for the Puerto Rican independence struggle and defense of Nationalist Party political prisoners. It, along with the Communist Party, influenced Democratic Representative Vito Marcantonio, whose district encompassed East Harlem, and obtained his support for independence for Puerto Rico. However, the repression of the Nationalist Party in Puerto Rico by the U.S. government and the jingoism organized in preparation for World War II limited its effectiveness. The Nationalists opposed the war and refused to serve in the army of U.S. imperialism. Many served prison terms for draft evasion.

Another political force within the small Puerto Rican community was the Stalinized Communist Party. Because of its influence in many unions and its dominance in the American radical movement, some Puerto Rican militants were drawn into its ranks. They became disoriented and miseducated during the war. In its drive to support the imperialist war effort, the CP shamelessly collaborated with the employers and their government to stifle militancy among workers and oppressed minorities.

After the war, when the Communist Party itself became a target of the McCarthyite witch-hunt, both in the U.S. and in Puerto Rico, most of its Puerto Rican cadres drifted away. Some key leaders left after the Hungarian revolution and the Khrushchev revelations in 1956.

The twists and turns of the CP line, its failure to support the Nationalist Party victims of repression during World War II, and the class-collaborationist miseducation of its membership, kept the CP from becoming a major political force among the generation of Puerto Ricans who moved to the U.S. after the war.

After the intensification of repression in Puerto Rico and a drive by the Muñoz Marín government to strengthen ties with the U.S. government, militants of the Nationalist Party launched an armed attack on Blair House, President Truman’s home, in 1950. In 1954, Nationalist militants organized a pistol shooting in the House of Representatives. The ruling class seized the opportunity to whip up a campaign of hysteria and repression against Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans were accused of causing the housing shortage and unemployment and of coming to New York solely to collect welfare—they were charged with responsibility for all the ills of society. The press also tried to create the impression that Puerto Ricans “naturally” resort to violence when they participate in politics.
This witch-hunt generated a climate of fear that inhibited Puerto Ricans from exercising their rights and intimidated them from participating in radical political activity. Coupled with the economic boom, the absence of any class-struggle organization with mass support enabled the commonwealth government’s office in New York to become a key organizing center for the community. In this situation even the reactionary Catholic church hierarchy appeared to be progressive when Puerto Rican workers turned to it for help in exposing some of the racketeer unions preying on them.

However, there was no authentic, independent voice of the Puerto Rican community—no organization that commanded the respect, loyalty, or allegiance of the majority of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. It became fashionable for liberal sociologists and academicians to analyze the “passive” nature of Puerto Ricans. But what really was at work was the difficult adjustment Puerto Ricans had to make to a new, hostile environment. And it was an adjustment that had to be made without leadership or powerful allies.

The new Puerto Rican movement burst onto the political scene in 1966 with a revolt against police brutality in Chicago’s Northwest Side. Since then Puerto Ricans have been involved in strikes, campus struggles, the antiwar movement, prison revolts, and demonstrations against cutbacks in social services. They have fought against inequality in education, against racial and sexual discrimination in employment policies, and for better treatment for veterans.

Most of these actions have been led by local organizations and coalitions that emerged from the struggles themselves, such as the Young Lords and the Por los Niños coalition in Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

Some organizations, such as the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund and ASPIRA, have initiated significant legal suits for equal rights against the government and employers. But they have generally not engaged in or initiated mass actions.

Defense committees have been established to defend victims of political persecution. Most notable were the cases of Carlos Feliciano, a framed-up Nationalist Party militant who was finally released in 1975; and the five Puerto Rican Nationalists railroaded to jail in 1950 and 1954. They are Lolita Lebrón, Oscar
Collazo, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irving Flores, and Andrés Figueroa Cordero. They have been in jail longer than any other political prisoners in the Americas.

As in the Black community, government-financed antipoverty agencies, most of them with ties to the Democratic Party, have assumed the leadership of many actions in order to tame them and channel them into the framework of capitalist politics. As a result a number of militant community leaders have been bought off or co-opted.

**Fight for Equal Education**

The fact that Puerto Ricans speak Spanish is used by the ruling class and its apologists to rationalize their discriminatory policies. They push the racist concept that Spanish-speaking residents do not deserve the same pay, working conditions, housing, or standard of living as English-speaking workers.

The response of Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking minorities, especially Chicanos, has been to fight for the constitutional right of their children to an equal education. In a 1974 decision, *Lau v. Nichols*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that placing non-English-speaking students in the same curriculum as English-speaking students, with no attempt to take special compensatory measures, is a denial of equal education to non-English-speaking students and a violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The long struggle for bilingual and bicultural education led to this landmark decision, but, like the 1954 Supreme Court ruling on school desegregation, it will not be implemented without a fight. The first major test of the *Lau* decision came in New York City where the board of education was sued by ASPIRA, a federally funded organization set up to help Puerto Ricans gain a college education. A federal court decree based on the *Lau* decision agreed to by both sides ruled that special classes for all children who cannot function in English had to be instituted by September 1975.

This decision raised the hope that major progress would be made in bilingual-bicultural education. However, many school administrators, with the aid of racist teachers, are sabotaging attempts to set up classrooms for Spanish-speaking students. The decree says that when children are able to function in English
they are to be moved back into monolingual English classrooms. This ability to function in English is determined by inaccurate, teacher-controlled tests and may only mean the child knows enough to hear commands to sit down or keep quiet from a monolingual English-speaking teacher. This undermines bilingual-bicultural education and leads to cutbacks in the hiring of bilingual teachers.

The implementation of the Lau decision received another blow when the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued a memorandum in April 1976 instructing its offices that bilingual education is not required to provide equal education for non-English-speaking students. This is a retreat from HEW’s previous position.

The fight for bilingual-bicultural education in some cities has been accompanied by the demand for parent control over the hiring of administrators and teachers, curricula, and allocation of funds. Puerto Rican parents insist on this to fully implement bilingual-bicultural programs and to ensure that teachers and administrators aren’t abusing their children.

The fight for bilingual-bicultural education is complementary to the struggle for school desegregation by busing. They both are aimed at fighting inequality in education.

Another aspect of the struggle for bilingualism is the insistence that the language of Cervantes is just as good as the language of Shakespeare. Puerto Ricans desire to become part of the work force in the United States, which means becoming proficient in the tools, customs, and language of the shop, factory, restaurant, or institution in which they work. But they have the right to maintain their knowledge of Spanish and their own cultural heritage. For many Puerto Ricans Spanish is a tie to their country of origin, and it provides access to a broader world and culture that would be narrowed by the loss of their language.

District One Struggle

The struggle against racism in New York City’s Community School District One is one of the most significant movements in which Puerto Ricans have played a leading role. It grew out of the 1967-68 citywide struggle of Blacks and Puerto Ricans to combat inequality in education. In 1967 three districts were set up in the city as experiments in decentralization. They included Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn, a district in Harlem, and a
district in the Lower East Side, part of which included what is now District One.

When the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district school board tried to hire Black teachers and institute new teaching methods more in tune with the needs of Black and Puerto Rican students, the United Federation of Teachers, led by Albert Shanker, called a racist strike to beat back this move and discourage similar initiatives in other districts.

This reactionary action defeated the Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggle by weakening a proposed decentralization law that would have given parents more say in the running of schools in the communities of the oppressed minorities. Despite its many deficiencies, the law that was adopted in 1969 has been used by Black and Puerto Rican parents as a weapon in the struggle against racist inequality in the schools.

In the Lower East Side, parents challenged the 1968 strike by opening nearly all the schools and keeping them open with parent volunteers. This was when Puerto Rican, Black, and Chinese parents in the district first forged a bloc.

In the first school board election, in 1970, the UFT leadership successfully elected a majority of its supporters to the District One board. However, parent struggles in the next two years forced resignations and new appointments until the pro-community-control forces won a majority in 1972. One of its first moves was to appoint Luis Fuentes, a veteran of the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggles, as superintendent. It also hired more competent Spanish-speaking administrators and paraprofessionals, established more bilingual and bicultural programs, and moved the district office to where it was more accessible to parents.

However, since then the pro-Shanker forces have reestablished a majority on the board, removed Fuentes, and reversed most of the other advances instituted by the parents.

The District One fight has highlighted the central demands Puerto Rican parents are raising to combat inequality in the schools. These include more funds to improve schools in their communities; more bilingual programs to help students learn basic subjects in their own language; and parent control over curricula, hiring, and allocation of funds for the schools in the Puerto Rican communities.

Despite its ups and downs this parent-led struggle has been a model because of the way it has drawn together a broad array of
forces in direct-action struggle. It successfully avoided the pitfall of basing its leadership and finances on government-financed antipoverty agencies and Democratic Party clubs, which have derailed countless other community struggles. It has used direct action such as picket lines, demonstrations, and rallies; court suits against illegal and undemocratic moves by the city administration, the board of education, and the UFT leadership; and election campaigns for school board.

The District One struggle has played an important role in combating Albert Shanker's demagogy by exposing the racist policies and attitudes of the UFT officialdom. It has served as a beachhead in the struggle against Shankerism and has been an example to other oppressed communities and to rank-and-file teachers looking for allies in the struggle against cutbacks and layoffs.

**Student Movement**

The radicalization among students in the 1960s and 1970s found its reflection among Puerto Rican students. This became particularly visible when Puerto Ricans and Blacks in New York's city university system waged a militant struggle for admission to the colleges. The city university system had boasted of its free tuition policy but through competitive examinations had succeeded in maintaining an almost totally white enrollment.

Black and Puerto Rican students took over the City College of New York in 1969 and held it with the support of the community. Their demand for open admissions was finally granted despite protests from both liberal and conservative politicians that this was "racism in reverse" and would "lower educational standards."

In 1970 in the South Bronx, Puerto Ricans won the struggle to have a college set up in their neighborhood. Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College, the only public bilingual college in the country, was established by the City University of New York.

The educational system, when it deals with Puerto Rican history and culture at all, does so in a distorted and dishonest way. At many colleges throughout the Northeast, students demanded and won Puerto Rican studies programs to counter this attempted obliteration of the Puerto Rican culture and heritage.
As a result of these struggles the Puerto Rican Student Union was formed to try to unite the Puerto Rican campus organizations and forge a common citywide federation. Lack of perspective on how to unite the different campus groups and an unsuccessful attempt to move the focus of its activity from the campus to the community caused the PRSU to atrophy and disappear.

The open admissions victory brought a dramatic rise in the number of Puerto Ricans entering the city university system. The total number, in comparison to the Puerto Rican population, was small, but seemed to open up new hope that Puerto Ricans would now be able to enjoy a change in their status and standard of living. The hope was to be shortlived. In 1976, in the context of the general offensive against the working class in New York City and cutbacks in social services, the city university budget was cut, free tuition abolished, open admissions ended, and Puerto Rican studies programs slashed.

Underlining the racist nature of the cutbacks, the city university voted to close Hostos. This attack was aimed at the entire Puerto Rican community that uses the facilities, night classes, and special programs. The attack on Hostos galvanized numerous protests, including marches and rallies and a take-over of the school. The threat posed by the beginnings of an alliance between students and the Puerto Rican community forced the government to retreat and provide funding for Hostos for at least one more year.

The Young Lords

The 1966 Northwest Side rebellion in Chicago prepared the ground for the Young Lords Organization. It had been a street gang but evolved into a political organization under the influence of the rebellion.

This revolt, the first solely Puerto Rican explosion to hit the national press, marked the political awakening of a new generation of young Puerto Ricans who were at home in the barrios of the cities, considered them their “turf,” and were willing to fight for them. They had little or no memory of Puerto Rico, although they were eager to trace their roots. It also reflected the beginning of the end of the illusion that Puerto Ricans would improve their material conditions without a struggle.

The emergence of the YLO in Chicago in 1968 inspired a group
of Puerto Ricans in New York, the Sociedad de Albizu Campos (Albizu Campos Society), to affiliate with the Chicago group the following year. Unlike the Chicago organization, the New York leadership was composed principally of student activists, some of whom had been radicalized on the campuses and influenced by the Students for a Democratic Society. The two groups coexisted in a common formation for about six months, but split because their different backgrounds made it difficult to establish an authoritative national apparatus. The Young Lords Party, as the New York group was named after the split, initiated a series of actions: dumping garbage in the already filthy streets to force the sanitation department to clean them up; taking over a church to serve the community’s needs; and a dramatic though shortlived take-over of Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx in order to get better medical care and end racist practices. The Young Lords Party received wide media coverage and won sympathy from the Puerto Rican community for its actions despite the fact that the majority of the community did not go along with its ultraleft rhetoric.

The impact of the Black movement on the Young Lords Party was clearly shown by its emulation of the Black Panther Party, by the major role Black Puerto Ricans played in its leadership, and by the fact that some of its leaders had previously been in the Black Panthers while others left the YLP to join the Black Panthers.

Like the Panthers, the Young Lords were victimized by police harassment and infiltration. The government’s disruption campaign was facilitated by the Young Lords’ ultraradical rhetoric. Like many youth groups at the time, they were attracted to Maoism, and by 1972 the party had degenerated into a Maoist sect. It was renamed the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization. Most of the original leaders left or were driven out of the PRRWO.

The PRRWO's sectarianism prevented it from effectively mobilizing support for the October 27, 1974, pro-independence rally at Madison Square Garden. The chief preoccupation of the PRRWO was to expose what it termed the “revisionist” slogan of “A Bicentennial Without Colonies,” around which the largest pro-independence demonstration in the U.S. up until that time was built. Its use of physical violence against opponents within the radical movement and its sectarianism have cut it off from effectively participating in struggles. The result has been to
narrow its supporters to a few colleges in New York City. Its influence on the Puerto Rican community is nil.

As one of the Maoist groups in the U.S. it was involved in the unity maneuvers aimed at establishing a single Maoist multinational party in the U.S. However, that effort did not succeed in creating any such new Maoist formation, and the membership of the PRRWO remains overwhelmingly Puerto Rican.

The Young Lords Organization in Chicago has been reduced to a relatively small group under the leadership of José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, one of the organization's founders. It is active in community work and orients toward reforming the Democratic Party. Jiménez ran a campaign oriented to the Democratic Party in the nonpartisan elections for alderman in 1975 and was a delegate to the Democratic Party's mini-convention in Kansas City.

**Puerto Rican Socialist Party**

The Puerto Rican Socialist Party, which until 1971 was called the Pro-Independence Movement, is a major radical party in Puerto Rico. It has been operating in the U.S. since 1959, but has grown and become more active since 1971. It has established chapters in cities outside of New York, including, among others, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Newark.

The PSP has been influenced politically by the colonial revolution, particularly the Cuban revolution, and the heritage of the nationalist movement in Puerto Rico. It has generally supported the positions and policies of the Cuban Communist Party for more than a decade. This is not surprising considering the historical links between the revolutionary movements of the two countries and the Castro regime's refusal to abandon its active support of Puerto Rico's independence despite intense pressure from Washington.

The relationship was evident during the international struggle against U.S. aggression in Vietnam, when Cuba organized solidarity actions with the Vietnamese freedom fighters and the MPI and the University Federation for Independence (FUPI) were leaders of the antiwar and antidraft campaign in Puerto Rico. The MPI also participated in many antiwar activities in the U.S.

Both the Cuban CP's active support to guerrilla warfare in Latin America and its adaptation to the Moscow Stalinist line
have influenced the PSP. But in spite of its close relations with the Cuban CP, the PSP has not merged or affiliated with the pro-Moscow Stalinist parties in the U.S. or Puerto Rico. It maintains its own distinct identity and political policies. The PSP attempts to avoid taking sides on the big debates between the major tendencies in the international workers’ movement by invoking solidarity within the “socialist camp.” This notion of unity led the PSP to support the capitalist popular front regime in Chile and to hail the imperialist MFA government in Portugal. It has also led to silence or acceptance of many reactionary policies of the Stalinists, including the repression of dissidents by the bureaucratic regimes in China and the Soviet Union.

In 1974 the PSP branch in the United States established a student organization, the University Federation of Puerto Rican Socialists (FUSP), and has become involved in community and student struggles. Most prominent has been the struggle to preserve Hostos Community College in New York City.

However, the basic policies and program of the PSP in the United States are determined by the party’s campaigns in Puerto Rico. The political axis of its activities in the U.S. is organizing support for those campaigns.

To its credit the PSP, more than any other organization in the U.S., has waged an extensive propaganda campaign against U.S. colonial oppression of Puerto Rico. It was the prime initiator and organizer of the mass rally in Madison Square Garden in support of Puerto Rican independence and the July 4, 1976, “Bicentennial Without Colonies” demonstration in Philadelphia.

As the most prominent fighter in the U.S. for Puerto Rico’s independence, the PSP is capable of attracting considerable support. Being part of a larger party in Puerto Rico also makes the PSP better able to exercise an influence beyond its own forces in the U.S.

A major step taken by the PSP was the announcement of a slate of candidates for the 1976 elections in Puerto Rico. This broke with its past policy of boycotting the colonial elections. While the PSP organized support in the U.S. for these candidates, it had little to say about what Puerto Ricans should do in the U.S. elections.

Flowing from its concentration on building support in the U.S. for the struggle in Puerto Rico is its concept that, at this time, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico need a single Puerto Rican party.
In practice they counterpose this to drawing together in a centralized revolutionary socialist party the most conscious leaders of all sectors of the U.S. working class, including the Puerto Rican national minority living in the U.S. The centralized power of the capitalist state in the U.S., however, dictates the need for such a party.

The PSP and FUSP memberships include different viewpoints and widely varying levels of political understanding both in Puerto Rico and the U.S. For example, after its 1975 convention in Puerto Rico, the PSP leadership said there had been differences in the party over participating in the 1976 elections in Puerto Rico.

Despite political differences with the PSP, the Socialist Workers Party seeks to establish discussions with leaders and members on the best way to defend Puerto Rican rights in the U.S., how to advance the struggle for independence, and how to best advance the socialist revolution in the U.S. Wherever possible we try to participate in united actions.

Democratic Right to Equal Representation

Although Puerto Ricans come to the U.S. as citizens with the legal right to vote, run for office, and work without special permits, the ruling class has deliberately denied them their rights and tried to exclude them from political life. Literacy tests, English-only ballots and voting instructions, and racist gerrymandering are the principal means they have used to accomplish this. Consequently most communities with Puerto Rican majorities are represented by non–Puerto Ricans in city councils, school boards, state legislatures, and the U.S. Congress.

For a long time Puerto Ricans have been waging a struggle against these restrictions and for the democratic right to be included in the political life of the U.S. and to be represented by Puerto Ricans. As a result several important victories have been won. In 1973 a federal court ordered New York City to have bilingual ballots and voting instructions for the first time in both the general election and the school board election. This ruling was upheld by a 1974 court decision and extended to require Spanish-speaking personnel at the polls. In 1975 Congress extended the 1965 Voting Rights Act another ten years and broadened it by making bilingual elections mandatory in districts where more than 5 percent of the voters do not speak English.
However, despite these important rulings and laws, Democratic and Republican election officials still try to find ways of circumventing them.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has documented the serious undercount of Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and other Hispanic minorities by the Bureau of the Census in 1970 and noted that this has reduced the number of districts that qualify for bilingual ballots and instructions.

The emergence of Puerto Rican Democratic Party clubs, which attempt to replace the older, more established Democratic machines in the barrios, is a distorted reflection within capitalist politics of the struggle for the democratic right of Puerto Rican representation. Many of these have been closely tied to government-financed antipoverty agencies. With the rise of the Puerto Rican movement and the breaking down of some of the barriers to Puerto Rican involvement in politics, these clubs have been able to get a few Puerto Ricans elected to local positions in the Democratic Party and to public office.

The most prominent Puerto Rican elected official is Herman Badillo, who was elected to the U.S. Congress from the South Bronx in 1970. Badillo is pointed to as a symbol that Puerto Ricans can "make it" in U.S. politics. When he ran for mayor of New York in the Democratic primaries in 1969 and 1973, many Puerto Ricans hoped he would be elected and would do something to alleviate the intolerable conditions they face.

Significant sectors of the ruling class also backed him. They believed a Puerto Rican mayor, supported by Puerto Ricans and many Blacks, would be more effective in maintaining the support of these oppressed minorities to capitalist politics and demobilizing their struggles. They favored a course similar to that followed by the ruling class in other major cities where Black Democrats have been elected mayors.

Badillo has carefully demonstrated his loyalty to big business. In response to the New York City budget crisis he demagogically opposed wage increases for city workers on the grounds that they take funds away from the Puerto Rican community. This ploy advanced the ruling class goal of dividing the working class by pitting one sector against another. He refused to support the Por los Niños campaigns in New York's District One, and he opposes independence for Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rican elected officials have joined with their Black and Chicano counterparts to form caucuses and press their demands
Independent Political Action

The two-party system is the way the capitalist ruling class maintains its monopoly over the country’s political life. It owns and controls the Democratic and Republican parties, which are equally committed to preserving the capitalist system and its evils of war, racism, and exploitation.

Illusions are deliberately fostered that the working class and the oppressed national minorities can win reforms and improve their condition by supporting their “friends” in these parties. But reliance on either of these parties facilitates the ruling class aim of diffusing and co-opting independent struggles of the masses.

To advance its own goals the working class must break from the capitalist parties and steer a course of political independence. Its mass actions must be independent of these parties—not dependent on funds or favors from them, not limited by a desire
to avoid embarrassing them, and not subordinated to getting them elected. Independent political action means putting nothing ahead of the demands and interests of the working class and oppressed national minorities.

In order to break the two-party stranglehold, the working class needs to form its own political party to give direction and reinforcement to its struggles. A mass revolutionary workers’ party is needed to lead the struggle to replace the capitalist rulers and establish a workers’ government.

A giant step in this direction would be the formation of a labor party based on the organized power of the unions. This would not be a labor version of the Democratic and Republican parties or a vote-catching machine for up-and-coming “labor politicians.” It would be a new type of party that strengthens the independent mobilization of all sectors of the oppressed and helps aim their force at the common enemy. Workers running as independent labor candidates on a local level can help set an example and point the way to a nationwide party of labor.

Since the 1960s there has been considerable discussion about independent political action in the Black and Chicano communities and some attempts have been made to establish independent Black and Chicano parties. Mass independent parties based on either the Black or Chicano communities, both of which are overwhelmingly working class, would also be a significant step forward in breaking with the capitalist parties and laying out a course of political independence for the working class. They would be powerful tribunes and organizers of their communities.

Within this strategic framework of independent working class action, and as part of the struggle by Puerto Ricans to be included and represented in the government, Puerto Ricans should consider running their own independent candidates against those of the Democrats and Republicans. Campaigns for these candidates would strengthen the struggles of Puerto Ricans and would give them an independent voice in the electoral arena. The concentration of Puerto Ricans in big cities, especially New York, means that state and city legislators and a few members of Congress could be elected who would for the first time be beholden to no one but the Puerto Rican community, whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of the bankers and bosses and their Republican and Democratic hirings. It would also be an important example to the labor movement and other
oppressed national minorities to break from capitalist politics. So far there have been very few examples of independent Puerto Rican candidates. The Socialist Workers Party has endorsed these candidates whenever they have run for office independently of and in opposition to the capitalist parties. We have supported them, as in the case of José Fuentes for state assemblyman in New York City in 1965, even if they were not socialist and in spite of our criticisms of their programs.

The Puerto Rican Struggle and the Labor Movement

The American labor movement is potentially the most powerful ally of the Puerto Rican struggle, but under its present class-collaborationist and self-serving leadership it is indifferent or hostile to the struggles of the most oppressed groups. Its record in respect to Puerto Ricans is particularly miserable. The first experience for tens of thousands of Puerto Rican workers with the labor movement in the U.S. was recruitment into racket-infested locals of the Retail Clerks, United Textile Workers, International Jewelry Workers Union, and other unions in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. These were traps for grabbing dues while sweetheart contracts guaranteed sweatshop wages for the workers, big rake-offs for the racketeers, and class peace with the employers. Usually these unions held no meetings or elections, and both the city government and the AFL-CIO hierarchy were in complicity with this mammoth dues robbery of Puerto Rican newcomers. Attempts by some Puerto Rican workers to organize their own unions to circumvent this situation were brutally crushed with city government help.

These particular conditions were somewhat alleviated when several of the locals were expelled from the AFL-CIO in the late 1950s after Puerto Rican workers flooded the AFL-CIO with requests for legal assistance. Even the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, historically a reactionary obstacle to the development of class-struggle methods by the unions, was pressured into exposing the situation.

Today Puerto Ricans are often barred from more skilled jobs by unions that act as job trusts for white workers. Most notorious are the United Federation of Teachers in New York City and the building-trades unions.
In New York City, for example, where 23 percent of the students in the public schools are Puerto Rican, only about 1 percent of the teachers are Puerto Rican. This is the bitter fruit of Shankerite opposition to affirmative-action programs and preferential hiring to help move toward equality for Blacks and Puerto Ricans. It is part and parcel of the same racist policy behind the UFT leadership’s opposition to full bilingual-bicultural education and its fierce struggle against Puerto Ricans and Blacks having a say over the administration of the schools in their communities.

Like the Social Democratic Shankerites, the officialdom of the construction trade unions has vigorously resisted opening the doors to Puerto Rican workers. Puerto Ricans, united with Black and Asian workers in New York City and Boston, have participated in demonstrations against the discriminatory hiring policies of the construction industry and the racist, white job-trustism of the building trades.

In some unions, such as the Transport Workers and Taxi Drivers in New York City, Puerto Rican unionists have joined with Blacks in caucuses fighting for their special interests.

The unions with the largest number of Puerto Rican workers today are the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees (District 1199).

Puerto Ricans in the ILGWU have second-class status. No Puerto Ricans are on its executive board and few hold staff positions. Thousands of Puerto Rican garment workers are employed in sweatshops that the ILGWU officials refuse to help organize.

Both AFSCME and District 1199 reflect the growth of unionism among public and social service workers in the past fifteen years. They have brought thousands of new forces into the labor movement, including Blacks and Puerto Ricans, and have tended to feel more pressure to support social struggles. AFSCME, for example, supported the Por los Niños campaigns in New York’s Lower East Side.

However, today public and social service employees are a major target of the ruling class offensive to drive down wages, working conditions, job security, and social services, and to divide the working class. Massive layoffs of public employees have hit Puerto Rican workers particularly hard as they are being laid off in disproportionate numbers.
The bureaucratized leadership of these unions is demonstrating its bankruptcy by counting on collaboration with capitalist politicians rather than class-struggle methods. They desperately attempt to defend their dues base of a shrinking number of relatively more privileged workers in their unions rather than chart a course to fight for the broader social needs of the class as a whole.

This narrow policy facilitates the ruling class strategy of dividing the working class by pitting workers in the private sector against public workers; public employees in different departments against each other; employed workers against the unemployed, students, and welfare recipients; workers with greater seniority against those more recently hired; and white workers against Blacks and Puerto Ricans. This dead-end scramble for fewer jobs and funds especially victimizes Puerto Ricans, who have lower seniority, greater unemployment, and proportionately more welfare recipients.

For labor to lead the fight for even the most elementary needs of the working class, a new kind of leadership is needed. The development of a class-struggle left wing in the union movement is necessary to provide this leadership. It will use class-struggle methods to fight for the workers' interests and to champion the social struggles by the oppressed, and it will map out a political course for the unions independent of the two employer parties. It will lead the fight for a labor party based on the organized power of the unions. A labor party will be a crusader for the Puerto Rican struggle for equality, the organization of Puerto Rican farm workers, independence for Puerto Rico, and the release of the five Puerto Rican Nationalist political prisoners. Puerto Rican unionists will be in the forefront of developments toward the formation of a class-struggle left wing and the creation of a labor party.

Farm Workers

There are tens of thousands of Puerto Rican seasonal workers employed mostly in agriculture on the East Coast. There is no accurate count of how many come each year, and the number varies from year to year depending on the capitalist business cycle in the U.S. A portion of those who come (an estimated one-fourth in 1974) are employed under contracts negotiated between contractors' associations and the Puerto Rican government. The
contractors then supply labor to both smaller farms and corporate farms. Workers under these contracts are supposed to get the minimum wage, but the growers usually end up cheating them out of the full amount of even this pittance. The rest of the migrant workers have no contracts and suffer even worse conditions. Conditions for all Puerto Rican farm workers are barbaric and inhuman. Housing is crowded and unsafe, field sanitation facilities are nonexistent or inadequate, and pesticides endanger the health of the workers. Farm workers get no overtime pay, no fringe benefits, no job security, no promotions, and no unemployment insurance. Growers overcharge them for food, beer, wine, and cigarettes, and they shortchange their paychecks. In the 1970-75 period nearly four thousand workers in New Jersey won complaints for $190,000 of pay systematically cheated from them. Thousands more did not file complaints for fear of losing their jobs. There have also been a number of cases where Puerto Ricans who wanted to leave the farms were prevented from doing so and were kept in virtual slavery. Lawyers, and even Democratic politicians, who seek to give assistance to farm workers or examine the conditions in the camps are often denied access by the growers.

The outrageous treatment of seasonal farm workers has generated protests, strikes, legal actions, and a union organizing drive.

In 1972, migrant workers employed in the potato fields on Long Island conducted an unsuccessful strike for decent wages and humane living conditions.

A drive to organize Puerto Rican tobacco workers in Connecticut was undertaken by the Farm Workers Association (Asociación de Trabajadores Agrícolas, ATA). The ATA seeks to replace the Puerto Rican government as bargaining agent and negotiate higher wages. This drive had its highest peak so far in 1974 when the ATA threatened to call a strike and received broad support, including the endorsement of United Farm Workers leader César Chávez and the Connecticut State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. In 1975 the drive was set back by the growers' decision to hire mostly local unemployed workers. The ATA has since merged with the California-based United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO, and is also trying to organize in the labor camps in southern New Jersey.
The attempt to organize Puerto Rican farm workers faces special difficulties because farm workers are not guaranteed the legal right to organize and bargain collectively.

Relationship with Other Oppressed National Minorities

Most Puerto Ricans are concentrated in cities where there are also large populations of other oppressed national minorities, especially Blacks and Chicanos. Usually the Puerto Rican barrios are next to or overlap with the communities of these oppressed nationalities. The similar nature of their oppression naturally leads to common struggles and sometimes common organizations. The Por los Niños coalition in District One in New York's Lower East Side united Puerto Rican, Black, and Chinese parents in a common fight for equal educational opportunities. Although there were frictions between the different components of this alliance, unity was key in sustaining this struggle for so long.

The Attica prison revolt in 1971 was also an example of Blacks and Puerto Ricans uniting around demands that affected both groups.

The struggles of each oppressed national minority have reciprocally influenced the others. Victories won by Puerto Ricans fighting for bilingual ballots and education in New York and Boston reinforce struggles by Chicanos in Texas and Colorado demanding the same thing. The rise of the Black movement in the 1960s particularly helped stimulate the radicalization of both Chicanos and Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Ricans also live in or next to communities with many undocumented workers, especially from the Caribbean and Central and South America. One of the largest communities, an estimated 300,000, comes from the Dominican Republic. In the New York metropolitan area alone there are 1.5 million persons without legal papers, according to government estimates.

Some employers will not hire Puerto Ricans, using the excuse that they could be “illegal” Dominican or Guatemalan workers posing as U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico. This underlines the importance of not allowing the employers to turn Puerto Ricans against undocumented workers and the importance of the Puerto Rican movement supporting the struggle for the rights of undocumented workers to jobs, unemployment benefits, and all other social services, and opposing all deportations.
Although there are many points of collaboration between Puerto Rican and other oppressed minorities, the ruling class tries to pit each against the others. School officials in Boston, for example, have tried to take advantage of court-ordered busing to undermine bilingual-bicultural programs. These programs are concentrated in a few schools, and the school board tried to disperse Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans throughout the school system. Moves of this type must not be allowed to divide Blacks and Puerto Ricans fighting for the same goal—an end to inferior schools for their children. School busing need not be carried out at the expense of bilingual-bicultural programs.

The ruling class also tries to incite hostilities by getting Black and Puerto Rican antipoverty agencies to fight each other over the few crumbs doled out by the federal government.

In respect to collaboration with other forces, Puerto Ricans can best guarantee that their demands and needs will not take a second place if they unite themselves in their own independent organizations. This will both strengthen their struggle against the ruling class and help reinforce collaboration with their allies.

Assimilation or Self-determination?

The large stream of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. in the past thirty years means that more than one-third of all Puerto Ricans now live in the United States. According to the 1970 census, about 45 percent of these were born in the U.S., compared with 25 percent in 1950, and many of those born in Puerto Rico came to the U.S. at a very young age. Thus, the outlook of an increasing proportion of Puerto Ricans is being influenced by life in the barrios of the U.S.

Puerto Ricans, unlike European immigrants before them, are not being assimilated, that is, becoming another "ethnic" group with simply residual cultural characteristics of their homeland. While more Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are becoming better educated and a thin layer of lawyers, educators, public officials, and politicians is emerging, there has been no significant improvement in the condition of the great majority of Puerto Ricans compared with the rest of the population. The gaps between the unemployment rates and income levels of Puerto Ricans and of the population as a whole are not narrowing. The segregation of Puerto Ricans into inferior schools and housing is not disappearing.
The fact that Blacks, who have been in America for 350 years; Chicanos, who were annexed 130 years ago; and Native Americans, who were here before the Europeans, have not been integrated into capitalist America points to the unlikelihood of this road for Puerto Ricans. The American "melting pot" has never included nonwhite national minorities.

Even if all second-, third-, or fourth-generation Puerto Ricans adopt English as their principal or exclusive language and become "Americanized," they will still be subjected to the deep-rooted racism necessary to American capitalism.

Like all nationally oppressed peoples, Puerto Ricans have the right to self-determination. The depth of pro-independence sentiment and agitation in Puerto Rico and the dynamic of the class struggle there have led revolutionary socialists to support the demand for an independent, sovereign Puerto Rico.

However, for Puerto Ricans in the U.S. the solution to the question of self-determination could take other forms. For example, it is not excluded that the masses of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. will choose to return to their country and become part of an independent Puerto Rico.

They could also choose: to integrate into a socialist United States; to establish a separate state in the U.S.; to create a federation of councils exercising community control of the Puerto Rican communities; or some other solution. This decision assumes the removal of the capitalists from power and the establishment of a workers' state. Which solution will be chosen depends on the experience of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and the course of the class struggle and economic developments in Puerto Rico and the U.S.

Whichever course is adopted, it will be the obligation of the American labor movement to defend it. If Puerto Ricans return to an independent Puerto Rico or establish a separate state on U.S. soil it will be the responsibility of a workers' government in the U.S. to provide all the material assistance necessary.

It would be premature to rule out the possibility that Puerto Ricans in the U.S. would return in large numbers to the island. They are still a very fluid population consisting of sectors with different experiences and outlooks.

Every year thousands of Puerto Ricans move back to Puerto Rico from the U.S. Many of them are here long enough to save some money or learn a skill. Others aren't able to find the
opportunities they seek. For most Puerto Ricans, Puerto Rico is still a place they can return to where they have relatives and friends. This also includes some U.S.-born Puerto Ricans, who now comprise about 5 percent of the population in Puerto Rico.

The relative newness of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. is reflected in the fact that first-generation Puerto Ricans are still a majority in the U.S. In 1970 the median age of the second generation was only nine, and most second-generation Puerto Ricans have not entered the labor force. Only 7 percent of the heads of households over the age of sixteen were born in the U.S.

There is no indication that the masses of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. view themselves as a people radically different from Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, there is considerable political and cultural interchange between them.

Puerto Ricans in the U.S., however, are also getting more involved in the political life of the U.S. as they fight back against the specific forms of oppression they face here. They are establishing organizations, organizing protests, and running for political office. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, which makes this process easier than for other national minorities, such as Dominicans, Haitians, and Mexicanos, who face deportation for political activity.

Many of the social and cultural pressures, deprivations, and abuses experienced by Puerto Ricans living as a minority in the U.S. are different from those in Puerto Rico, where the vast majority is Puerto Rican. Life in the barrios leads to different political experiences, social outlooks, and cultural tastes, especially among the younger generation that has never lived—or lived only a few years—in Puerto Rico.

This generation is seeking its own identity. Puerto Rican writers, artists, and musicians are trying to express the unique feelings and values of the Nuyoricans. The Young Lords, emerging from Puerto Rican street gangs in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were an authentic political expression of the particular resentments and aspirations of Puerto Ricans growing up in the U.S.

If present trends continue, the younger generations, which are more rooted in the life of the United States, will play an increasingly important role in the Puerto Rican community. What changes this will bring in attitudes, cultural traditions, and ties to Puerto Rico remain to be seen.
Program for Puerto Rican Struggle in the U.S.

Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are engaged in a twofold fight. As an oppressed national minority they are fighting for equality and self-determination. In this role they are one of the allies of the working class.

At the same time they are part of the working class in the U.S., struggling for emancipation from capitalist exploitation.

Neither side of this combined struggle can achieve its goals without revolutionary action that replaces the present capitalist rulers with a workers’ government, opening the road to socialism.

Both struggles are woven together, and one cannot win without the victory of the other. The struggle against national oppression cannot succeed without the revolutionary mobilization of the working class as a whole. And no workers’ government will be established if the labor movement subordinates or opposes the fight of Puerto Ricans and other oppressed national minorities for their immediate needs and democratic rights.

In the fight for full social and national emancipation of the Puerto Rican people, which culminates in the socialist revolution, Puerto Ricans should not subordinate their struggle to a spurious unity with the labor movement based on the class-collaborationist policies of the labor bureaucracy. On the contrary, the independent mobilization of the Puerto Rican people is one of the factors impelling the radicalization of the working class as a whole, helping to create the conditions for unity on a class-struggle basis.

The combined character of the struggle of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. requires a program that will mobilize Puerto Ricans around both immediate and democratic demands for equality and national liberation, and transitional demands that help the working class cross the bridge from their immediate aims and present level of consciousness to revolutionary socialist conclusions.

The central problems of special concern to Puerto Ricans are discrimination in employment, education, and housing, language discrimination in all aspects of social and political life, and lack of genuine representation in legislative and political bodies.
To combat job discrimination Puerto Ricans are calling for preferential hiring and upgrading. They are demanding that employers not be allowed to use layoffs to reduce the proportion of Puerto Rican workers, and that civil service examinations be held in both Spanish and English.

To end inequality in education Puerto Ricans are demanding bilingual-bicultural programs with competent teachers so that Puerto Rican students can be educated in the language of their choice. Open admissions are called for to give every Puerto Rican student an opportunity to attend college.

Puerto Ricans are demanding an end to housing discrimination and the right to live in neighborhoods of their choice.

To end all language discrimination competent Spanish-speaking personnel are required in all public facilities, at the polls, and in the courtrooms. Bilingual ballots and voting instructions are necessary to provide equal voting rights. Spanish-language books must be provided in the prisons.

Puerto Rican women are demanding that the added oppression they suffer be ended. They are demanding the right to equal pay for equal work, an end to forced sterilizations, the right to have legal and safe abortions, and adequate free child-care facilities.

Puerto Ricans are also demanding control over the institutions and affairs of their communities in order to help guarantee their democratic rights.

Puerto Ricans need to break from the parties of their oppressors, the capitalist Democratic and Republican parties, and run independent Puerto Rican candidates where feasible.

This program, which is essential to the struggle against inequality, does not present answers to all the key questions facing Puerto Ricans. For example, in respect to jobs, Puerto Ricans will be among the most consistent and militant fighters for jobs for all. To achieve this goal, the first requirement is a massive program of public works. Also needed is the immediate reduction of the workweek, with no reduction in take-home pay, in order to spread the work among those who need jobs.

The program against inequality is thus part of a broader working class program. The demands, method, and strategy for this program are outlined in the Socialist Workers Party’s 1975 resolution Prospects for Socialism in America, especially the section “Labor’s Strategic Line of March.”
This program is based on the perspective that the American workers must see the big social and political questions facing all the exploited and oppressed of the United States as issues of direct concern to them. It is rooted in the knowledge that only when the working class mobilizes its own independent collective strength, on the political as well as economic field of battle, can it successfully chart a course to the establishment of a workers' government.

The Socialist Workers Party

The American working class has the momentous task of wresting state power from the most powerful ruling class in all of history. The necessity to carry out this mission is being demonstrated by the breakdowns and crises of the capitalist system. But the working class will need something it does not yet have—its own mass revolutionary party.

We are confident that explosive events will open the door to rapid changes in the political consciousness of the working class and lead to upsurges out of which a mass revolutionary socialist party can emerge. However, this can happen only if the cadres of this party are assembled beforehand around a clear perspective and program. This is what the Socialist Workers Party is doing.

Only a party that is deeply rooted in the working class, especially among its most oppressed sectors, can lead the American working class and its allies to power. This means systematic work in all sectors of the mass movement to recruit the most capable fighters to the party. There is no way that the working class can achieve its aims unless it brings together in a common fighting party the most resolute revolutionists of the working class and the best fighters from all national minorities—Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican. The brutality and centralized power of the capitalist state dictate that the working class and its allies have the greatest possible centralization and cohesion in their political leadership.

Puerto Rican militants, concerned first and foremost with the struggles of Puerto Ricans, may at first see no reason or advantage in belonging to a proletarian party with broader perspectives and concerns. However, revolutionary activity in the labor, Black, Chicano, women’s, student, and other mass movements provides a means of enlisting allies for the Puerto
Rican movement and of strengthening the interconnections between all the various expressions of the class struggle and the Puerto Rican struggle. In a party that includes revolutionists from other sectors of the working class, Puerto Ricans will help sharpen the understanding of their allies about the needs of Puerto Ricans and strengthen the program of the working class in respect to the Puerto Rican struggle.

The SWP believes, and acts on the belief, that the working class has no interests that come ahead of or are higher than those of the Puerto Rican struggle. It believes that the working class cannot achieve its goals without the Puerto Rican people and other nationally oppressed peoples achieving theirs.

Membership in the SWP also means being politically part of an international revolutionary movement. While reactionary legislation prevents formal affiliation to the Fourth International, the SWP, since its founding, has been an integral political component of the world party of socialist revolution.

For Puerto Rican revolutionists, being part of an international movement means being armed with a world outlook and program that helps give direction to the revolutionary struggles in both the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican Fourth Internationalists who live in the U.S. and are politically active in the Puerto Rican movement and class struggle here are part of the Socialist Workers Party. Those who live in Puerto Rico or move from the U.S. and become part of the struggle there are members of the SWP's sister organization, the Liga Internacionalista de los Trabajadores (Internationalist Workers League).

While the working class struggles in Puerto Rico and the U.S. have their own dynamic and distinct peculiarities, they are very much interconnected because of the colonial relationship between the two countries. Collaboration in a common international movement between revolutionists in the two countries is essential to working out political perspectives and encouraging mutual assistance.

In order to establish itself more firmly in the Puerto Rican movement and win more Puerto Rican members, the SWP has to devote more attention and energies to the Puerto Rican struggle. The SWP membership around the country has to become better educated and more familiar with Puerto Rican history and the current tendencies and organizations in the Puerto Rican movement.
More branches especially oriented to Puerto Rican communities will have to be established. Sales of our Spanish-language books and pamphlets and distribution of Spanish-language election campaign literature should be increased. Although the SWP doesn’t have a Spanish-language publication at this time, sales of *Perspectiva Mundial* and of *La Verdad*, publication of the Puerto Rican Trotskyists, can be organized.

Our proletarian orientation and unconditional support to the struggle for Puerto Rican liberation give us optimism that we will succeed in winning Puerto Rican revolutionists. But this will be achieved only with systematic work and serious application to the task. It will be a fundamental test of our capacity as a revolutionary party.
Abortion, 33, 58
Affirmative action, 9, 50
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), 50
Anti-Vietnam War movement, 34
Asociación de Trabajadores Agrícolas (ATA), 52
ASPIRA, 14, 36, 37
Assimilation, 54-55
Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, 49
Attica prison revolt, 53
Badillo, Herman, 14, 46, 47
Bilingual ballots, 45, 53, 58
Bilingual-bicultural education, 9, 37, 38, 39, 50, 54
Black movement, 10, 18
Black Panther Party, 42
Bureau of the Census, 46
Busing, 54
Campos, Pedro Albizu, 24
Castro, Fidel, 23, 43
Catholic church, 14
Chávez, César, 52
Chicano movement, 10, 19
Child care, 33, 58
City College of New York, 40
City University of New York, 12, 40
Civil Rights Act (1964), 37
Claridad, 16
Collazo, Oscar, 37
Commission on Civil Rights, U.S., 46
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Office of, 14
Communist Party (USA), 35
Communist Party, Cuban, 43, 44
Compact of Permanent Union, 24, 26
Connecticut State Labor Council, 52
Cordero, Andrés Figueroa, 37
Cuban revolution, 25, 43
Culebra, 25

Democratic Party, 5, 40, 58; influence on Puerto Ricans, 13, 14, 37, 46, 47
District One struggle, 38-39, 40, 46, 53
Discrimination in employment, 12, 28, 30, 57-58

Dominican Republic, 53
Equal education, 37
Equal representation, 45-46
Equal Rights Amendment, 34
Father Gigante, 14
Federal Bureau of Investigation, 32
Feliciano, Carlos, 36
Five Puerto Rican Nationalists, 16, 36-37, 51
Flores, Irving, 37
Fourth International, 12, 26
Fuentes, José, 49
Fuentes, Luis, 39
Hispanics, 19, 20
Hostos Community College, 12, 15, 16, 40, 41, 44
Housing, 30-31
Human Rights Commission, New York City, 12
Income, 30
Independent Black party, 18
Independent Chicano party, 19
Independent Puerto Rican candidates, 19, 48, 49, 58
Independent Puerto Rican party, 19
Independent working class political action, 18-19, 47-49, 57-59
International Jewelry Workers Union, 49
International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), 50
Jiménez, José, (Cha Cha), 43
Labor movement, U.S., 27, 49-51, 55
Labor party, 18, 51
Language discrimination, 31, 57, 58
Lau v. Nichols, 37, 38
Lebrón, Lolita, 36
Liga Internacionalista de los Trabajadores (Puerto Rico), 10, 60
Madison Square Garden rally for Puerto Rican independence, 15, 42, 44
Marcantonio, Vito, 35
Marín, Muñoz, 35
McCarthyite witch-hunt, 25, 35
Migration and distribution, 27-29, 54
*Militant*, The, 6
Miranda, Rafael Cancel, 37
National question, 17
National Student Coalition Against
Racism, 16
National Union of Hospital and Health
Care Employees (District 1199), 50
New Progressive Party, 26
Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggle, 38-39
Open admissions, 40, 58
*Perspectiva Mundial*, 6, 61
Philippines, 23
Police brutality, 9, 36
Popular Democratic Party, 25
Por Los Niños, 36, 46, 50, 53
Pro-Independence Movement (MPI), 25, 43
*Prospects for Socialism in America*, 6, 58
Puerto Rican Democrats, 19, 47
Puerto Rican Development Project, 14
Puerto Rican farm workers, 51-53
Puerto Rican Forum, 14
Puerto Rican independence, 9, 12, 24-25, 26, 35
Puerto Rican Independence Party, 25
Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Educa-
tion Fund, 36
Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, 24, 34
Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers
Organization, 16, 17, 41-42
Puerto Ricans in the U.S., 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17; assimilation, 54-55; discrimi-
ation in employment, 12, 28, 30, 57-58; employment, 28-29; housing, 30-31; income, 30; and judicial system, 31, 32; and labor movement, 49-51; language discrimination, 31, 57, 58; migration and population distribution, 27-29, 54; political action, 18-19, 45-49, 57-59; self-determination, 10, 16-17, 54, 55, 57; in U.S. Army, 23, 25, 27; on welfare, 29; women, 33-34
Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), 15-16, 17, 19, 25, 43-45
Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee, 16
Puerto Rican Student Union, 41
Puerto Rico: relationship to U.S., 23-24, 26
Racism, 32-33
Raza Unida Party, 47
Retail Clerks union, 49
Self-determination, 10, 16, 17, 54, 55, 57
Senior, Clarence, 14
Shanker, Albert, 39, 40, 50
Socialist Party, 14
Socialist Workers Party, 6, 7, 10, 16, 59-61; branches of, 11, 13; involvement in
Puerto Rican struggle, 9, 11; program
for Puerto Rican struggle, 18-19, 49, 57-59; relations with PSP, 15, 16, 45
Sociedad de Albizu Campos, 41
Sterilization, 33, 58
Students for a Democratic Society, 42
Supreme Court, U.S., 24
Taxi Drivers union, 50
Thomas, Norman, 14
Transport Workers Union, 50
Trotskists, 10-11, 26; in Puerto Rico, 10, 60
Undocumented workers, 53
United Farm Workers, 52
United Federation of Teachers (UFT), 39, 40, 49, 50
United Nations General Assembly, 25, 26
United Textile Workers, 49
University Federation for Independence
(FUPI), 43
University Federation of Puerto Rican
Socialists (FUSP), 15-16, 44
U.S. Army, 23, 25, 27
U.S. Navy, 25
*Verdad, La*, 10, 61
Voting Rights Act (1965), 19, 45
War Manpower Commission, 27
Women, 33-34
Young Lords, 36, 41-43, 56
Young Socialist Alliance, 11, 15, 16
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