

Repression in Puerto Rico

As Puerto Rican political prisoner Carlos Feliciano says, "Puerto Rico is a paradise for everyone but Puerto Ricans." A paradise of political stability and progress is *Time* and *Newsweek's* image but the reality is quite different. Today, the people of Puerto Rico suffer the most excruciating economic conditions: prices, at least 25% higher than New York City, wages 50% lower than in the United States, and 30% unemployment. And they are completely powerless in their own country.

Puerto Rico is a classical colony of the United States: a country under the full political and economic control of the United States government. 85% of all industry on the island is directly controlled by U.S. corporations. Although Puerto Ricans have their own government and a constitution, all political decisions are subject to approval from Washington. It is this reality that molds and dictates the lives of Puerto Ricans.

In response to this colonial exploitation the people of Puerto Rico have begun, as they have many times in the past, to build a massive independence movement . . . a movement to free their country.

Over the past several years demonstrations in support of independence have been growing larger and larger and the movement — almost destroyed during a

period of brutal repression in the early 1950's — has again attracted masses to its ranks.

That movement's power and visibility has embarrassed the "yanqui" government repeatedly, the most recent and best known incident being the United Nations General Assembly decision last year that Puerto Rico has a right to self-determination and independence. That the two most distinguished independence leaders, Ruben Berrios of the Puerto Rican Independence Party and Juan Mari Bras of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party were allowed to testify before the UN's Committee on Decolonization, a precedent-setting moment, was a blow to the U.S.'s carefully constructed image of the "Free Associated State".

The government's answer to this movement has been its traditional answer: repression. Puerto Rico is quickly becoming a full police state.

This repression has taken both legal and illegal forms; it has been both admitted and covert and has been in traditional and newly developed methods.

Today, in Puerto Rico, the courts are processing more than 200 individual cases of political arrests. These range from massive indictments against national unions such as the teachers union (which staged a shut-down of all of the island's secondary and grade schools recently), the use of the Taft-Hartley law

Police fire on students at University of Puerto Rico



against workers' militants of the National Workers Union (Union Nacional de Puerto Rico), the individual cases of police brutality against protesting students which were turned into cases of "resisting arrest", etc . . . to the major cases of explosives possession and use, such as the frame-up against Puerto Rican Socialist Party President Julio Vives, among others.

This use of political cases to attempt to cripple the movement is not confined to Puerto Rico. It has been used widely with political prisoners in this country. The most famous case is the case of the five Nationalist political prisoners, who have been in Federal prisons for over twenty years. These brothers Oscar Collazo, Irving Flores, Rafael Cancel Miranda and Andres Figueroa Cordero and sister Lolita Lebron are symbols of the continuation of the struggle, and of the repression waged against it. They are the only remaining prisoners from the repression of the 1950's.

There are others, of course; attempts on the part of the U.S. government to discredit and destroy the Puerto Rican movement: the now-famous case of Carlos Feliciano, the frame-up of the migrant workers Pepe and Ruben, political activist Pancho Cruz, the draft resistance case of student leader Jose "Che" Velasquez, and on and on.

Still, this old tactic of burdening the movement with court cases is not the only one in the government's repertoire. Today's Puerto Rico is a country of tension. Gestapo attacks by right-wing forces, whose links with the CIA were examined and proven in public hearings held by the Center for Constitution Rights some time ago, have resulted in numerous injuries. The pro-independence newspaper *Claridad* has been bombed on three separate occasions. The Impresora



Police attack high-school student organizer

Nacional, the pro-independence printshop, has been firebombed several times. Militants of various organizations are constantly assaulted while doing their political work by plainclothes members of the police department and both PIP and PSP offices have been bombed and physically attacked. All of this with the tacit approval, sometimes participation, and — in all occasions — the protection of the colonial government in Puerto Rico.

This illegal activity is now being legalized. The whole penal code is due for a revamping and some of the highlights of the bill which the colonial government is proposing are:

- *reorganization of the police force allowing police to search and detain people for simple suspicion
- *authorization of police to obtain search warrants by phone
- *authorization of trials *in absentia*
- *elimination of all retrials
- *laws on conspiracy, contempt and "chronic criminal activity" aimed at effectively muzzling the independence movement.

It is clear that the situation of colonialism, as blatant as the United States government if capable of, is rivaled only by the tremendous repression which is attempting to protect it.

Just as it is up to the North American people to support the struggle for independence, just as it is up to us to struggle to get our government out of Puerto Rico, it is up to us to fight that repression — which we fight here — as it takes form in Puerto Rico. Repression in Puerto Rico is not just the Puerto Rican people's issue. This is the moment of unity around the struggle for independence for Puerto Rico.

Police assault striking workers at racetrack

