

COMMENT ON PUERTO RICO SOLIDARITY WORK

—by some members of PFOC

EDITORIAL NOTE

We of PFOC have opposed the practice of some individuals and organizations of the white left who take it upon themselves to make authoritative decisions on the affairs of oppressed nations as to their way of struggling for their own liberation and social revolutions. In the US this is very often done from the standpoint of liquidation of the oppressed nations into one big multi-national working class family, with whites securely in charge.

We continue to oppose and criticize such practices as a white supremacist negation of the right of self-determination.

As a new organization still beginners in international solidarity activity, we have come to realize that we must also learn about the history and politics of each liberation struggle if we are to learn which are the revolutionary politics and who are the revolutionary forces, in order not to confuse them with those politics and forces which have already been rejected by the peoples of the nations concerned as actual helpers of the oppressor nations.

It is important that we be forthright and open about questions that are not clear or where we have differences and criticisms. At the same time we are responsible not to allow the criticisms we have of others to eat up and destroy our support and solidarity where unity in the struggle is the main priority.

We want to receive criticism of ourselves seriously, but also when necessary we defend and explain the internationalist and revolutionary content of our politics and activity within the dominant oppressor nation.

Our first task is to strengthen unity and solidarity with liberation movements. Very important in doing this is to fight opportunism and chauvinism within the white left and the white dominated solidarity formations. This set of relationships needs more analysis and discussion. Here we only add that, while we are broadening our understanding, we will continue these criticisms of the white left as a major task.

In discussing these questions it is also

necessary to take into account the sometimes differing views and opinions of Third World organizations and comrades about our own or joint solidarity work within the dominant oppressor nation.

Many such struggles arise from the fact that oppressed nation comrades have a much more immediate and urgent interest in solidarity than most of the white left which tends to be very calm and relaxed about the whole subject, which is a chauvinist approach in itself.

However, differences also arise about relationships of politics and organization, including party building: all the questions about vanguard and mass, minimum and maximum positions etc. What is at stake here is the anti-imperialist content and quality of the solidarity movement. Rapid expansion at the price of major concessions to opportunism, putting numbers in command, will fail in the end. The only basis for solid growth of our movements are internationalist and revolutionary content. We will be writing more on these critical subjects.

At the recent national conference (Chicago, Feb. 1977) of the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee (PRSC), there were important struggles about the nature of anti-imperialist solidarity work.

The struggles came about in opposition to a political line claiming to be anti-imperialist but which actually liquidates the leading role of national liberation in defeating US imperialism. This line rejects the importance of self-determination in building solidarity with Puerto Rican liberation. In this article we will discuss the essential understandings of imperialism that can guide a mass solidarity movement. The article will criticize the incorrect politics put forward at the conference by most of the present leadership of PRSC; politics that in fact hinder in-

stead of support the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle, and thus also liquidate the role of revolutionary class solidarity and struggle within the oppressor nation as well.

Before examining the history of PRSC and the recent conference, it is important to clear up one or two false issues which have already been injected into the debates about solidarity work. One of these is the charge that revolutionaries and anti-imperialists are clinging to abstract theory at the expense of "real" mass organizing based upon class struggle. There are two main props to this charge. One is that anti-imperialists ignore or reject the fact that various forms of material and political support and reforms can be very important to the cause of national liberation regardless of the political level or role of those who join in the cause and the action.

To this we respond that we too are aware of such relationships and needs. However this begs the question. The question is should we condone people who use the need for popular support to deny the greater truths and the more profound need to make revolution and national liberation? National liberation and anti-imperialism are indispensable concepts not only to Marxist-Leninists and communists, but to all of the solidarity and mass movements. This is what our world and our country are like. Charges of the alleged narrowness and dogmatism of telling the truth about our world do not and cannot move real mass solidarity consciousness forward a single inch. Such charges only serve to confuse people about the nature of the struggle and the result is to keep opportunism in command.

Practice also shows that this is a false notion of mass appeal. The most clear and open of revolutionaries end up with the greatest support from all sorts of folks. Witness Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X.

The other point often made is that most of the large numbers of revolutionaries needed for the struggles of today and the future have to come from people who are not at this moment committed anti-imperialists and revolutionary communists; they

are right now at less advanced levels of social consciousness.

This is true, and it is important. But this will never change if people who presume to lead united fronts, coalitions and masses in the name of solidarity and anti-imperialism, and even of revolution, Marxism-Leninism and socialism, cater to all the most backward and white and male supremacist and opportunist ideas and habits.

No—the way to revolution is not to offer re-assurance and bait that it will be easy—no sacrifice—no sweat. The thing that builds real organization and real movements is the political truth, that it is necessary to oppose capitalist empire and support national, class and social revolution, openly and straight-forwardly. Naturally, it's easier to use all the old gimmicks and publicity stunts than to be a serious revolutionary fighter. It's hard to build movements in the US that do stand up and fight and that persist. All of how to do that cannot be covered in this article or this issue, or this Journal or by any small group. But we and significant numbers of others are beginning and will keep on. This is why we need to examine PRSC doings as one little but important step.

Those who promote opportunist politics like those which prevailed at the PRSC conference are responsible for the damage done already and for that which will follow until their line is defeated.

A brief look at the history of PRSC will help in understanding the conference. PRSC was formed about two years ago on the initiative of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP). The PRSC's initial political statement affirmed the leading role of national liberation struggles and the importance of international solidarity work. The PSP projected the PRSC as a united front of forces within the US left organizing to carry out work in support of Puerto Rican struggle for independence.

From the beginning, the leadership of PRSC has steadily liquidated fundamental characteristics of US imperialism. It failed to address and fight the national oppression of Blacks, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Asians, and

Chicanos/Mexicanos within the US, and it did not understand the importance of the struggle against women's oppression. Thus it ended up denying the existence of white and male supremacy and putting forth a "multi-national working class" analysis of the US. By requiring these positions as a basis of unity, disunity has been created with some of the most consistent supporters of national liberation who do not want to melt their national identity into the multi-national pot.

Liquidating the fight against US imperialism obscures the fact that Puerto Rico is an oppressed nation whose people are engaged in a national liberation struggle. PRSC has concentrated instead on a populist approach focussed on the "illegality" of US colonialism under US and international law. Self-determination has been raised only as a slogan, it is not used as a guide to work and support for the Puerto Rican struggle. Nor has PRSC developed adequate solidarity relations with Puerto Rican groups other than PSP. It has ignored the fact that the liberation struggles of Puerto Rico will take many forms and has historically included and will continue to include the form of armed struggle.

In this process solidarity work serves as an "anti-imperialist banner", a left cover for opportunist politics. In particular, some forces (for example those who unite with the line of *Osawatamie*, political journal of the former WUO) used their activity in support of Puerto Rican independence as a cover for not supporting the Black Liberation movement, the Native American or other national liberation movements.

Eventually, PRSC moved still further to the right, going so far as to hold that any work making an issue of Puerto Rico is "objectively anti-imperialist". The national leadership proposed to massify the PRSC by lowering the political standards of the organization so that all the forces in the US that opposed colonialism for whatever reason could be organized on an equal basis. PRSC would itself concentrate to work on the Dellums

Congressional resolution calling for US withdrawal from Puerto Rico. The slogan projected for the coming period was "US Out of Puerto Rico!" instead of the former call for "Independence and Self-Determination!" The national liberation of Puerto Rico was to be abandoned, presumably in favor of what would "sell" in the US.

After the July 4th Coalition (1976) the San Francisco PRSC chapter undertook to criticize its own wrong line and practice, especially in pitting Puerto Rico against other anti-imperialist struggles. The SF chapter opened up a struggle to reaffirm anti-imperialist politics. This struggle was participated in also by members of Prairie Fire (PFOC) as being in accord with PFOC's commitment to struggle for the rectification of opportunist politics.

The local challenge to the opportunist line and suppression of struggle that had been followed in the national July 4th Coalition and other PRSC programs, was pushed forward with the objective that PRSC should engage in anti-imperialist solidarity (not just support work) with Puerto Rico based on the leading role of national liberation struggles. The national PRSC leadership was put somewhat on the defensive by the San Francisco chapter struggle.

At this point, the *Guardian*, in the persons of Fran Beal and Irwin Silber, put itself forward as "representing Marxist-Leninist/anti-imperialist leadership" within PRSC. These persons formed political alliances with forces that had been dominant, such as the Mass Party Organizing Committee (MPOC), some chapter co-ordinators and national staff people. The National Board of PRSC then gave to Irwin Silber the task of drafting a new political statement for discussion and ratification at the upcoming national conference. A draft program representing the same political line and priorities was also circulated. These documents continued the line of liquidating the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle and the revolutionary potential of solidarity work in the oppressor nation. Their import was to define the PRSC as a liberal support

Irving Flores, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Lolita Lebron and Andres Figueroa Cordero under arrest after their armed attack on the US Congress, March 1, 1954

"The so-called crimes for which Five Puerto Rican Nationalists are presently serving in US prisons were a direct consequence of the invasion of our country by US armed forces and of all the acts of aggression that have been perpetrated against our people since July 25, 1898." Oscar Collazo



credit: "Puerto Rico: Our People's History"

organization under the cover of anti-imperialist rhetoric.

FORCES AT THE CONFERENCE

Conference preparations were firmly in the hands of the *Guardian*-led alliance. Agendas and rules were determined by this grouping in ways that diverted or quashed political struggle against their formulations. The Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) led in projecting a view that the PRSC should unite around "lowest common denominator" politics, and concentrate its energy on legislative and educational work for independence. PSP positions tended to reinforce the *Guardian*-MPOC camp on important issues.

But there were many other political forces present which made it difficult for the *Guardian*-led forces to achieve the degree of hegemony and control they were aiming for. The first obstacle to opportunism was the active participation and leadership by forces of the Puerto Rican national liberation movement, both from the island and the US. Representatives of the Movimiento Socialista Popular (MSP) and of El Komite-MINP (a group in the US with close ties to the MSP) emphasized the central reality that Puerto Rico was engaged in a national liberation struggle. They

both pointed out the role of the national liberation movements in advancing socialist revolution and the necessity of armed struggle in the fight for liberation. The Puerto Rican Peace Council (an organization of various forces including the PSP, the MSP, and independents) pushed the PRSC to undertake concrete solidarity activities around issues of central importance to the survival of the Puerto Rican nation.

The Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico and a grouping of independent Puerto Ricans from Chicago had, in effect, previously been excluded from PRSC. Among them were Puerto Ricans who had been subpoenaed to testify before the Federal Grand Jury investigating the Puerto Rican independence movement. In Chicago, the main solidarity with Puerto Rican liberation was carried on outside PRSC, as in the Committee to Free the Five Nationalists and in the Committee to Stop the Grand Jury. This group led a working alliance of forces at the conference called the *March 1st Bloc*. This Bloc also included oppressor nation forces like the Sojourner Truth Organization (STO) and the Brooklyn PRSC chapter, including forces from NY "PFOC" (which is not affiliated

with national PFOC). This Bloc confronted the liberal priorities of the national PRSC.

The PRSC delegation from San Francisco came with an alternative draft political statement which represented a compromise among the forces in the local chapter. This statement opposed crucial aspects of Silber's draft and proposed the following principles of anti-imperialist solidarity work:

- 1) that national liberation struggles are the leading force in the fight against imperialism, which is a single system;
- 2) that male supremacy is fundamental to imperialism; and
- 3) that support for self-determination is central in solidarity work.

Delegates from other West Coast PRSC chapters allied themselves with the SF paper at the conference in a joint caucus. These delegations also included PFOC members who were delegates and some who were observers. A substantial proportion of the conference delegates were not aligned with any political bloc, including many who had originally been organized into PRSC on the basis laid down by the existing national leadership.

MAIN STRUGGLES AT THE CONFERENCE

The San Francisco chapter paper held that an understanding of imperialism is necessary to guide the work of a mass anti-imperialist organization. Imperialism was described as a single system of national oppression, white supremacy and male supremacy, and class exploitation inside and outside US borders. National liberation was identified as the leading force in resisting and overthrowing that system. The debate over this amendment drew out the opposing world views of the forces engaged in solidarity work. Irwin Silber rose to explain that although he agreed with 90% of the proposal, and that a definition of imperialism should be included, the San Francisco paper was unscientific and obscured the fundamental and unchanged class contradiction of imperialism, which was only capitalism in its

monopoly stage.

Speakers supporting the SF PRSC position emphasized in response that Silber's analysis repudiated the leading role of struggles for national liberation and for women's liberation. Imperialism is capitalism in its deadly and dying monopoly stage, in which the world is divided into oppressor and oppressed nations. White supremacy is a central pillar of imperialism and so is male supremacy based on the exploitative sexual division of labor, a part of the fundamental production relations of imperialism: the double shift of women at home and on the job is a source of super-profits. Silber only pays lip-service to Lenin and anti-imperialism while ignoring its consequences for our solidarity work. Negating these most characteristic features of empire undercuts solidarity in the most critical and strategic areas. It robs the Puerto Rican national liberation movement of its strongest allies within the US—the Black, Latino, Native American nations who have shared a common history of national oppression and resistance.

What is substituted for the solidarity of the most oppressed in practice was spelled out by the national leadership's program proposal in these words:

“Working class and trade union solidarity between workers in Puerto Rico and the US can develop as a basis for solidarity of workers in this country with the liberation movement.

“Workers are often threatened in contract negotiations when confronted with the company's threat to move to Puerto Rico where wages are lower and health and safety regulations are virtually non-existent. Worker solidarity based on mutual respect for rights and aspirations can be a powerful response. Such an alliance can develop through support for strikers in Puerto Rico em-

ployees of the same company here, *and vice versa* (italics ours). It is particularly important to rally support to unions and strikers in Puerto Rico when their efforts are threatened by the imposition of the Taft-Hartley law and attacks from repressive agencies.

"The Taft-Hartley law, recognized by the labor movement in this country as a major obstacle to organizing, is even more stifling and repressive in Puerto Rico. This is because union organization was minimal at the time the law came into effect. Now, Puerto Rican workers are taking a leading role in the struggle against the Taft-Hartley. Support for this initiative from progressive unions in the US may be a springboard to a nation-wide drive against this most despised law."

These proposals are actually based on maintaining and reinforcing imperialist relations between the US and Puerto Rico. They call on Puerto Rican workers to support US strikes. The struggle of the Puerto Rican people is directed against the very jurisdiction of the repressive US agencies and laws, including the reactionary US trade unions. But PRSC was asked to identify the entire US work force with the interest of the most reactionary-led organizations most integrated into the service of monopoly capital/imperialism. This totally ignores the role of US unions in the suppression of the Puerto Rican independent workers movement, and depoliticizes solidarity work in favor of "bread and butter" appeals firmly rooted in defending imperial super-profits and privilege. This set of proposals, and others equally objectionable were thrown out in workshops, when forces from the Puerto Rican movement made clear their unacceptability. But the dominant national

leadership of PRSC pushed through acceptance of their program as a whole without discussion from the floor.

WHITE AND MALE CHAUVINISM

These proceedings reflect both national chauvinism towards Puerto Ricans and a disrespect and cynicism toward the revolutionary potential of millions of oppressor nation workers. They also reflect an incorrect position on women's oppression and liberation, and a denial of the leading role of women in the struggle against imperialism—a denial of the centrality of male supremacy to imperialism and revolutionary internationalist potential of white working class women.

Silber's draft was insulting in its dismissal and liquidation of women's oppression and male supremacy, barely mentioning the oppression of Puerto Rican women, and ignoring the role of women in the oppressor nation in building internationalist solidarity. Instead, Silber's draft off-handedly refers to male supremacy as "an erection of imperialism to enforce super-profits." The struggle for the leading role of women was weakened by differences on the struggle for women's liberation within the March 1st Bloc, which led to proposals to defer struggles about the oppression of women. This posed women's liberation against national liberation and obstructed dealing with the revolutionary cause of women as a strategic part of the whole.

As a result, the fact that male supremacy is necessary to imperialism, and that the women's movement can be a strong ally of Puerto Rican liberation, was never fully addressed by the conference. This weakened the potential for a fuller discussion of women's oppression and liberation. (There was no discussion of gay oppression. The conference refused to accept most sections of the SF paper on these issues.)

At the beginning of the conference, a women's caucus was voted down. On a series of motions from other chapters, portions of the SF paper on the oppression of Puerto Rican women were added to the draft. These excerpts, taken out of con-

text, equated the oppression of women in Puerto Rico with that of all women in the US. At this point Puerto Rican women at the conference objected to the positions being put forward and to their exclusion from the discussion as a violation of self-determination, and a caucus was approved to allow struggle over the amendment to take place. The caucus put forward a proposal which ultimately rejected the potential leading force of Puerto Rican women, and in its place put an analysis that "because women are subject to a barrage of bourgeois propaganda designed to ensure their participation in reinforcing ruling class ideology on future generations . . . women are in danger of being co-opted as a counter-revolutionary force." Thus Puerto Rican women are called backward while the white US conservative labor movement is called advanced.

national leadership treated self-determination only as rhetoric and not as an imperative political principle in developing solidarity with oppressed nations. The *Guardian* newspaper article on the conference had to be retracted with apology to El Comite and the MSP because of expressions of national chauvinism. This was another example of white US arrogance. For the article was an attempt to use differences within the Puerto Rican independence movement rather than respecting them.

Silber's draft as approved categorized Puerto Ricans in the US as an oppressed section of the "multi-national American working class" despite the fact that the situation and status of Puerto Ricans in the US and their relation to Puerto Rican nationhood is an open and unresolved question within the national liberation movement.

ARMED STRUGGLE

A special effort to define and control the struggle of the Puerto Rican people, through the vehicle of "solidarity", was evident around the issue of armed struggle.

The national draft dealt with the question of armed struggle only by lamenting that "when it comes to a fight" it will be "the sons, husbands and fathers primarily of

Don Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party until his death in 1965.



credit: "Puerto Rico: Our People's History"

the American working class who will be called on to die." On this issue as well, the *Guardian* position defines solidarity work according to what it thinks will "reach" or "hook" people in the US, abandons the Puerto Rican nation to imperialist attack, and in fact tries to limit the leading national liberation struggle to a level and scope it deems acceptable. This line generates reformist illusions.

The March 1st Bloc pushed forward the necessity of armed struggle to the national liberation movement, as a right and option thrust upon it and exercised in face of continuing US imperialist aggression and oppression. Opposition to this was mounted on the grounds that armed struggle was too "heavy" a question for PRSC to ad-

dress, that it meant condoning "terrorism", or was beyond the unity of a mass solidarity organization. This came from forces committed to "peaceful transition" and legalisms. At this point, the initiative of the MSP was decisive. A proposal they formulated was introduced by a SF delegate and adopted. It read in part:

This characterization of US imperialist domination determines the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to make use of revolutionary violence...to achieve its definitive liberation....Any movement of solidarity must take into consideration the inevitable use of armed struggle as a fundamental aspect of struggle against US imperialist domination of Puerto Rico. This aspect is part of the series of forms of struggle—legal and illegal—that will be used by the Puerto Rican workers and people in their anti-imperialist struggle.

The concrete forms assumed by armed struggle—as well as by other methods of struggle—will be defined by the character of the national liberation struggle and by the Puerto Rican revolutionary organizations, each applying those methods they understand are correct in order to achieve independence and socialism on the island.

A serious weakness of the debate on armed struggle is that it confined itself to defending the right of Puerto Ricans to resort to arms. It did not raise or define the duty of US progressive and revolutionary people to obstruct, oppose, sabotage and negate the armed force and violence by which the US government holds Puerto Rico captive.

Similar initiatives were taken, led

especially by the Puerto Rican forces and the March 1st Bloc, to redefine and rectify the work of PRSC on the campaign to Free the Five Nationalist Prisoners, and to instruct the PRSC to take up the attack on Grand Jury harassment of the Puerto Rican movement. Workshops approved these as priority areas of PRSC work, and adopted an approach to work around the Five as prisoners of war in the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle.

Previously, work around the Grand Juries had been non-existent within PRSC, reflecting an unwillingness to deal with the issues of armed struggle or to take leadership from the Puerto Rican forces involved. This was an abandonment of the entire Puerto Rican movement at a moment of sharp attack by the imperialist state. Similarly, work around the Five, imprisoned for their armed attacks on the US government in the '50's, had been restricted to a moralistic and defensive approach. PRSC treated the Five only as victims of repression rather than building support for the heroic and principled stand of the Five themselves in rejecting the authority of US imperialism, by developing solidarity with the right of the Puerto Rican people and nation to achieve liberation by any means necessary. The PRSC was unable to apply the lessons of Vietnam, of Cuba, of the Black liberation movement, to develop an understanding of Puerto Rican national liberation. It couldn't show how internationalist forces in the oppressor nation can be a real force on the side of national liberation.

OPPORTUNISM IN PRACTICE

Despite gains registered at the conference by the struggle to deepen PRSC's understanding of imperialism and its actual ability to do material solidarity, the national leadership, pushed by the *Guardian's* opportunist line, persists in its errors. Continuing practice makes it clear how this line actually impedes the development of solidarity and serves as an obstacle and hindrance to the Puerto Rican struggle.

One chapter of the PRSC in New York has withdrawn from a coalition to stop the

Grand Jury which had the support of the women and men imprisoned for refusing to testify. This NY chapter decided that the coalition principles, because they included demands for independence and self-determination (including the right of Puerto Ricans to bear arms) and "Freedom for the Five", were "too narrow". The national interim committee of PRSC has backed them up, proposing demands restricted to quashing the subpoenas and stopping the attack. This proposal, which is supposedly aimed at "broadening" support, has the effect of severing the clear connection which exists between the Grand Jury as a particular repressive tool and the ongoing attacks on the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle. Chapters currently involved in the coalitions in Chicago and NY would be "asked" to leave by the national leadership. This puts the PRSC in the outrageous position of opposing a coalition because it is demanding Puerto Rican independence and self-determination, and in fact calls on PRSC chapters to sabotage the defense efforts of Puerto Rican and Latino liberation forces under attack.

The lesson of these struggles is clear. Real solidarity within the oppressor nation must be based upon unity of the anti-imperialist struggles of the oppressed and of the oppressor nations. Taking internationalism and the fight against white and male supremacy as the concrete ap-

plication of Marxism-Leninism as the guide to our work means that it is necessary to struggle against opportunism in all phases of international solidarity work. There are people who seek to control the solidarity movement so they can manipulate the national liberation forces according to the narrow needs of a sector of the US left, which wants to build a "multinational" party. This opportunist line in solidarity work betrays internationalism in order to flatter the slowest-moving, most backward elements of the oppressor nation working class. This sells out the national liberation struggles. This surrenders the possibility of building a mass solidarity movement based on revolutionary principles. This surrender betrays the right to self-determination for oppressed nations.
By: PRAIRIE FIRE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE members active in Puerto Rico solidarity work.

Note: *BREAKTHROUGH* will shortly publish an additional article on the subject of solidarity activity in which events since the PRSC conference will be examined and evaluated. The problems of building solidarity movements that are both anti-imperialist in content and capable of organizing genuine coalition and mass support for national liberation struggles will be discussed further.

WHO WE ARE cont'd from inside front cover

led by oppressed nations around the world and within the US.

We struggle to implement these views in the prisoner solidarity movement, in communities, in workplaces, in international solidarity movements, and in the women's movement. We understand that revolutionary theory must guide revolutionary practice, and that practice tests the correctness of theory. We rely on the principles of democratic centralism and criticism/self-criticism to help determine, evaluate and correct our practice.

As an organization, we commit ourselves to active solidarity with national liberation struggles, to supporting the right of self-determination for oppressed nations inside and outside the US, and to combatting the white supremacist institutions of US imperialism. We commit ourselves to fight for women's liberation, for revolutionary women's leadership; for gay liberation, and against the male supremacist institutions of US imperialism.

We commit ourselves to fight against all forms of opportunism, national and male chauvinism, privilege, competition, and arrogance which have historically characterized most of the white oppressor nation left in the US. We commit ourselves to struggle with all who have honest differences with us and who are principled in the struggle. We will unite with all who break with opportunism to struggle against imperialism.