

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING, No. 54, April 7, 1973

Present: Breitman, Britton, A. Hansen, Jenness, Jones,  
Lovell, Shaw, Sheppard, Stone

Consultative: Dobbs, Kerry, Novack

Visitors: Garza, Perez, Scott, Seigle

Chair: Shaw

AGENDA: 1. Membership  
2. Puerto Rico  
3. Meat Boycott

1. MEMBERSHIP

Jones reported on the recommendation of the San Diego branch to readmit P.M. into membership in the party.

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the San Diego branch to readmit P.M. into membership in the party.

Carried.

2. PUERTO RICO

Jenness and Garza opened discussion. (See attached.)

Discussion

Motion: To reaffirm the position of the party in support of independence for Puerto Rico.

Carried.

3. MEAT BOYCOTT

Britton opened discussion.

Discussion

Meeting adjourned.

## Report on Puerto Rico

by Doug Jenness

given to April 7, 1973, Political Committee meeting

1. From 1508 when the first Spanish settlement was established until 1898 when American troops landed, Boriquen (Puerto Rico) was a Spanish colony. During the 400-year period a new nation emerged on the island. It was formed out of the racial blending of the native Indian population, Black slaves brought from Africa, and the Spanish settlers. A common language -- Spanish -- and a common culture emerged. The Puerto Rican nation was forged out of a common oppression at the hands of the Spanish rulers.

2. The forcible annexation of Puerto Rico by the United States during the Spanish-American war did not end the island's colonial status. It merely changed the oppressed nation's master. And today Puerto Rico still remains a colony of U.S. imperialism. It is politically, economically, and culturally dominated by the U.S. rulers.

3. The official view of the U.S. rulers is that Puerto Rico is a self-governing Commonwealth freely and voluntarily associated with the United States. This is totally false. The present Commonwealth status does not give Puerto Ricans a say over their own affairs.

On one hand they are supposedly U.S. citizens but they don't have the same rights as other citizens. They are not permitted to elect voting representatives to either house of U.S. Congress or to vote for the president of the United States.

On the other hand they don't have the rights of a self-governing country. Laws passed by the Puerto Rican legislature must first be submitted to the U.S. Congress which can amend, suspend or revoke them. The U.S. president has final veto power over the Puerto Rican legislature and he appoints judges for the Puerto Rican Supreme Court.

4. Nearly all of Puerto Rico's economic enterprises are controlled by U.S. corporations. Special tax exemptions are offered to U.S. businesses that invest on the island and the U.S. minimum wage law does not apply there. Distortions in the Puerto Rican economy created by imperialist exploitation forces Puerto Ricans to import consumer goods that could be produced on the island.

The bitter fruits of imperialist exploitation is high unemployment (estimates range from 15 to 30 percent) and high prices. Puerto Rico serves the imperialist profitmakers well as a pool of cheap labor both for the industries that establish plants on the island as well as those that use migrant labor on the continent.

"Operation Bootstrap," set up in the late 1940s by Governor Muñoz Marin with the collaboration of the imperialists, was to have made Puerto Rico the "showcase of democracy" in Latin America. This project helped to industrialize the island's economy without altering U.S. imperialist control.

5. For the last 75 years Puerto Ricans have suffered attempts by the imperialist oppressors to "Americanize" them. This has included attempts to make English the principal language for instruction in the schools. Although Spanish is now the main language of instruction, English still receives preferential treatment over other subjects. English is still the official language in the courtroom.

6. The political conclusion to be drawn from this description of U.S. rule over Puerto Rico is that Puerto Rico is an oppressed nation that has the right to self-determination. However, to recognize this right leaves open the road the Puerto Rican people will follow in determining their own affairs. Three solutions have been proposed and debated over the past few decades. They are statehood, commonwealth, and independence.

7. Statehood has traditionally been supported by the more conservative forces in the U.S. ruling class and their flunkies in Puerto Rico. For example, this is the position of the New Progressive Party which has ties with the Republican Party in the U.S.

8. Commonwealth status was established in 1952 during the administration of Muñoz Marin, the liberal leader of the Popular Democratic Party. At the present time this appears to be the status favored by most of the U.S. imperialist ruling class as well as their agents in Puerto Rico. Twenty years of experience with commonwealth status -- the "liberal" solution -- has shown that it is merely another form for continued U.S. domination and exploitation.

9. Independence is currently the position held by the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), and the Puerto Rican Communist Party.

Independence was also supported by the Fourth International and by U.S. and Puerto Rican Trotskyists in the 1930s and 1940s when there was a massive independence movement. One indication of the widespread sentiment for independence at that time was that when the bourgeois liberal Popular Democratic Party was formed in 1938 and won a majority in the Puerto Rican legislature in 1940, it felt it was necessary to include a plank supporting independence. It later abandoned this position which led to a split and the formation of the pro-independence PIP in 1948. In 1952 PIP received the second highest number of votes in the elections.

With the McCarthyite witchhunt in the 1950s the expression of independence sentiment subsided and the SWP, without dropping its support for independence, did not promote it during this period.

The Cuban revolution played a significant role in inspiring and ideologically influencing the resurgence of the independence movement in the 1960s. The Puerto Rican Independence Movement (MPI) which has since become the PSP was formed in 1959. Meanwhile, the PIP has grown and has recently declared that it is for socialism.

If one were to look at various electoral indicators it would appear that there was no significant support for independence. For example, a plebiscite on Puerto Rico's status held in July 1967 showed 60.5 percent of the votes for commonwealth, 38.9 percent for statehood and .6 percent for independence. It should be noted here, however, that the pro-independence forces organized a boycott against the plebiscite and held mass demonstrations (10-15,000 in San Juan in April and 30,000 in July) to protest it.

Other electoral results to be noted was that the conservative pro-statehood PNP won the governorship in 1968 interrupting 28 years of PPD rule.

In 1972 the PPD was put back in power. The PIP won 50,000 votes in the elections, less than they had expected. The PSP did not participate in the elections.

However, there have been several large pro-independence demonstrations in the last few years including one of 20,000 in Lares in 1968 and 80,000 in San Juan in 1971. This was the largest pro-independence demonstration ever held in Puerto Rico. This is in a country with 2.7 million people.

Also major struggles in opposition to being drafted to fight in U.S. imperialist wars and to U.S. target practice on Culebra have had a pro-nationalist and pro-independence character to them. The struggle against the draft was so successful that it virtually became impossible to arrest the thousands who evaded conscription.

10. Is there enough evidence for the SWP to reaffirm its support for independence?

The answer is yes.

First, the resurgence of the independence movement and its continued growth indicates that it was not a phenomenon peculiar to the 1930s and 1940s or ephemeral in character. Rather it is testimony to its authenticity as a significant and potentially powerful force in Puerto Rican politics.

Secondly, despite the movement's ups and downs it has demonstrated its capacity to win mass support even if it isn't expressed in elections.

Thirdly, independence is fiercely opposed by both bourgeois parties in Puerto Rico and by U.S. imperialism -- the enemies of Puerto Rico's working class. As the struggle of the Puerto Rican workers develops as it did in the 1930s, it will directly confront these enemies. The struggle for independence from Yankee imperialism and the U.S. labor officialdom will become a natural and necessary part of the fight for class emancipation in Puerto Rico. Neither commonwealth or statehood offer this independence from Yankee imperialism. They only offer continued subordination. The fact that there is virtually no Puerto Rican capitalist class and the overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans are workers gives the independence struggle added power.

11. The struggle for Puerto Rican independence can only be won through a socialist revolution in Puerto Rico.

12. By reaffirming our support for Puerto Rican independence, our press should give more coverage to the Puerto Rican independence movement and our candidates and other speakers should speak in favor of it.