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THE PROCESS OF
PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION
AND
THE U.S. WORKING CLASS

EL COMITÉ

Movimiento De Izquierda Nacional Puertorriqueno

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INTRODUCTION

On January 25, 1975, El Comit  - M.I.N.P. participated in a political forum sponsored by the Asian Ad-Hoc Support Committee. Other participating organizations in the forum were the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (P.S.P.) and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (P.R.R.W.O.). The role of Puerto Ricans in the United States was to be a central point of discussion of the forum which was titled "Puerto Rican Independence and the U.S. Socialist Revolution".

The following text was the basis of our presentation on that evening; it represents the second part of a continuous study being developed by El Comit 's Commission on the National Question. The first part of this study was published in the pamphlet "Puerto Ricans and Proletarian Internationalism" which may be ordered through our mailing address. Both parts of this study represent an attempt at bringing clarity to a fundamental aspect of Puerto Rico's struggle for National Liberation as well as its intimate relationship to the U.S. Socialist Revolution. As we stated on the evening of the 25th, this crucial question has been characterized by idealism and dogmatism, reflection of an unscientific approach to the question and contrary to the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

Central Committee El Comit  - M.I.N.P. (M-L)

THE PROCESS OF PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION AND THE U.S. WORKING CLASS

There are presently almost two million Puerto Ricans in the United States, overwhelmingly this population is composed of working class people. Within the North American working class, Puerto Ricans, and other Third World workers make up part of the most exploited and oppressed sector of the class. In general, Puerto Rican workers are concentrated in low paying jobs, suffer high levels of unemployment, experience discrimination at the hands of both employers and unions, live in the worst housing, and their children receive substandard education. Moreover, the presence of Puerto Ricans on these shores is no quirk of history; it is not because Puerto Ricans like cold weather; it is not because Puerto Rico is overpopulated; it is not because Puerto Ricans want to go on Welfare; rather, these migrations were, and still are, one of the direct consequences and manifestations of decades of U.S. imperialistic exploitation of Puerto Rico.

After the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, an expansionist war initiated by the U.S. in their search for new territories and markets, Puerto Rico became a colony of the U.S. It still is. In less than fifteen years, after the invasion, the social and economic structure of the Puerto Rican nation was radically transformed into what is commonly known as an export economy, determined by the demands from the capitalist center, in our case the extremely bitter sugar; where most of the national income was derived from exports, where available manpower was subject to extreme superexploitation, which consequently limited its consumption; an economy whose internal productive structure was characterized by rigid specialization and monoculture in entire regions; where most of the accumulated surplus was destined to be sent abroad in the forms of profits to absentee U.S. corporations, limiting not only the internal consumption but also the possibility of reinvestment; where the development of complementary economic activities was primarily determined by its relation to, its dependence on the export sector to which the product was sold; and where the whole social structure was shaped accordingly.

The time does not allow us to elaborate on the destruction, the sorrow, the hunger and suffering which the U.S. imperialistic policies brought to our people, nor can we stop to describe in full detail, as it should be done, the painstaking work, the horrible conditions of exploitation in which our people amassed fortunes for the capitalist in Puerto Rico.

One of the consequences of the radical changes in the Puerto Rican economy was the transformation of the peasantry into a rural proletariat forced to sell their labor in order to survive. Furthermore,

the transformation of the economy into sugar based one, brought about the abrupt and irreversible decline of two commercial crops which have been among the most important agricultural products throughout the XIX century: coffee and tobacco. The collapse of the coffee production displaces thousands of peasants to the sugar producing areas and to the larger urban areas, initiating the first



stage of a migrating process that would bring more than 1,000,000 Puerto Ricans to the U.S.

This newly created rural proletariat was employed for only a few months during the harvest; the rest of the time the workers were unemployed and constituted part of the vast army of reserve labor which typifies a capitalist economy. This brought a qualitatively different set of social relations into existence; the Puerto Rican economy was no longer to be characterized by small time individual production. The introduction of the cane sugar plantation with its absentee North American corporate ownership developed a proletariat class obliged to sell its labor to live. North American imperialism had accelerated and developed to its fullest extent the irreconcilable contradiction between capital and labor as the primary; as the principal contradiction, in Puerto Rican society. Unemployment and low salaries were the scourge of the sugar cane worker. The abundance of labor forced salaries to subsistence levels. Faced with these conditions of misery and exploitation, some 40,000 Puerto Rican workers migrated to the U.S. in the decade of the twenties.

Marx, in discussing one of the forms of the relative surplus - population, says: *and in proportion to the extent to which it does so, the demand for an agricultural laboring population falls absolutely, while the accumulation of the capital employed in agriculture advances, without this repulsion being, as in non-agricultural industries, compensated by a greater attraction. Part of the agricultural population is therefore constantly on the point of passing over into an urban or manufacturing proletariat, and on the look-out for circumstances favourable to this transformation.*"

By the time of the depression, the flow of migration lessened to a trickle and for a period the current reversed and many Puerto Rican returned to Puerto Rico.

By the end of the 1930's the expansion of the sugar industry in Puerto Rico had ended. Its eminent decline had started. Several factors contributed to this. First, the sugar producers in Puerto Rico were forced to compete with sugar beet producers in the U.S. who had mechanized production considerably on one hand, and in the other with sugar producers in Hawaii, Cuba, the Philippines and Santo Domingo. Sugar in Puerto Rico had relatively high production costs in comparison with the aforementioned areas. Secondly, the quota system imposed by the U.S. government, which attempted to control the over-production of sugar, favored other sugar producing areas impending further growth in levels of sugar production in Puerto Rico. Thirdly, the abundance of cheap labor and the continuous expansions of cane cultivated and provided relatively high profits to the corporations which were translated into the absence of radical innovations in the production process, an example of this being the differences in the level of mechanization of the process of production of sugar between Hawaii and Puerto Rico. The contraction of the sugar industry in Puerto Rico caused severe social and economic dislocations throughout the next decades.

During the early 1940's, a new political party, the Partido Popular Democratico, under the leadership of Luis Munoz Marin, came into power in Puerto Rico with a program of social reform and social justice. A very mild Agrarian Reform program which attempted to limit the amount of land which a corporation, but not an individual, could own was put into effect. Marginal land was distributed among the population and a program of industrialization, later known as Operation Bootstrap, was implemented. The extremely moderate



Agrarian Reform met unsurmountable and hysterical opposition in the U.S. Congress. Afraid and unwilling to go against the sugar interests, the P.P.D. concentrated their efforts on their program of industrialization based on the inducement of North American capital to invest in Puerto Rico. To this end, the colonial government developed programs of aids and incentives to North American industrial capital. These included tax exemptions, location assistance, labor negotiations, etc. But the primary incentive that the Commonwealth government pushed, and which appealed to the American companies, was the abundance of cheap labor and the non-applicability of federal minimum wage statutes. The colonial servants of imperialist interest were offering the working masses of Puerto Rico for exploitation to guarantee their class interest.

The number of companies that were enticed to invest in Puerto Rico were not enough to absorb the larger numbers of workers displaced by the contraction of sugar production. The high rate of unemployment would bring about the "nightmare" of overpopulation and the need for migration as a solution to the "problem". . . naturally nothing would be said of the ridiculously high profits being drained out by the U.S. corporations as a result of the exploitation of the Puerto Rican people. The government of Puerto Rico decided to foment and encourage massive programs of sterilization and migration. By 1965 more than a million Puerto Ricans had come to the U.S. and one of every three women of child bearing age in Puerto Rico had been sterilized. Many of today's prominent social scientists in the U.S., particularly Kingsley Davis, and J.M. Stycos, were, indirectly responsible for these genocidal policies.

The period of rapid capital accumulation after W.W. II, especially in the U.S., was able to draw on this mass of available surplus labor which existed in Puerto Rico.

Between 1940 and 1960 more than 1,000,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the shores of North America. The vast majority of these persons were rural proletariat, unskilled, with little formal education, and relatively young. In the early stages of this migration, the migrants gravitated to New York City. For example, in 1950, 80% of the Puerto Ricans living on the mainland were concentrated in New York City. Yet by 1960 this proportion had declined to 60 % as more and more Puerto Ricans migrated to other urban centers namely Chicago, Philadelphia, Jersey City, Hartford, Bridgeport, etc. Once here, the vast majority of migrants were integrated into the North-American economy and its working class. Puerto Ricans took jobs in the lowest paid areas of the economy. Unlike other immigrants, Puerto Ricans were not met by an expanding job market but by a restricting one. In fact, "many low skilled jobs were being eliminated by automation, others were protected by unions, but were not open to Puerto Ricans, and industry was moving to the suburbs taking jobs with it, while suburbanites were taking many jobs in the city. So, Puerto Ricans moved into the only jobs open: the low wage jobs in the service sector (as waiters, kitchen help, porters and hospital workers) and those in light manufacturing (sewing machine operators). In short, the jobs nobody else wanted.

"These jobs were characterized by low wages and the sectors in which they were found tended to be declining or unstable" (quote: Economic Factors Affecting Puerto Ricans in New York by C.E. Rodriguez). But though low paying, these jobs were vital to the North American economy in particular to New York City.

The situation of the Puerto Rican in the U.S. has remained relatively the same, one of oppression and exploitation. By 1970 according to the last census, one third of all the Puerto Rican men 16 yrs old and over in New York City were not working at the time of the census. One third of the Puerto Rican males in the working ages had no job

	PR/NJ Males 16 and over	PR/NY Males 16 and over	White/NY Males 16 and over
TOTAL	28,281	162,164	2,484,962
%	100.00	100.00	100.00
PROFESSIONALS	3.58	3.88	17.86
MANAGERS	3.38	4.35	13.58
SALES WORKERS	2.94	4.94	9.65
CLERICAL & KINDRED	5.87	13.64	12.22
CRAFTSMEN	16.09	15.47	17.65
OPERATIVES	36.89	22.57	8.15
TRANSPORT	6.45	7.40	5.14
LABORERS	10.79	6.34	4.82
SERVICE WORKERS	11.66	20.82	10.57

162,164 Puerto Rican males in New York were reported as part of the "experienced civilian labor force" in 1969. Of these, 3.88% were classified as professionals, 4.35% as managers, 4.94% as sales workers, 13.64% as clerical and kindred, 15.47% as craftsmen, 22.57% as operatives, 7.40% as transport operatives, 6.34% as laborers, and 20.82% as service workers. When compared with the distribution by occupation of the white labor force in NYSMSA some of the differences in the occupational characteristics are obvious: (a) 31% of all the white in the civilian labor force are classified as professionals and/or managers, only 8% of the Puerto Rican males fall within those categories; (b) on the other hand, 43% of the Puerto Rican males in the labor force are either operatives or service workers compared with 19% of the white males. Not only these are differences between the occupational distribution of both population when compared by major occupational categories, but even within these occupational aggregates there are obvious and significant differences which should be accounted for. Needless to say that the differences that are masked by the system of classification in question affects all the groups in society, although not necessarily in the same way. In the case of the total Puerto Rican population the differences glossed over are even more acute than those of other national groups, both within the Puerto Ricans and between the Puerto Ricans and other national groups.

When those commonly known or referred as professionals, i.e. architects, engineers, lawyers and judges, life and physical scientists, physicians, social scientists and teachers, are grouped as one sub-category 19.46% of all Puerto Rican professionals are included under it and 47.99% of all white professionals. It seems like some are more "professionals" than others.

But even that figure of 19.46% may be misleading if the differences within each specific category is not taken into account. Not all those included under "Physicians, Dentists, and other related practitioners" are medical doctors, and most of those who reported their occupation as teaching "for a living" be it Languages, Drawing, Dancing or Catechism, are included under teachers.

More than one-third of all those Puerto Ricans classified under "Physicians..." are pharmacists. Of all those classified under "Teachers..." are in other categories.

The Census reports the median earnings of the Puerto Rican by occupation for 1969, it does the same for Blacks, but it does not report the median earning for Whites, only for the total population, which includes not only the Whites, but also the Blacks and Puerto Ricans. As we know both the Black and the Puerto Rican population have the lowest earning scale in the whole U.S. Therefore, their incorporation into the total figures will tend to depress the median. The higher the proportion of Puerto Ricans and Blacks in the labor force, the greater the depressing effects on some of these measures. Those Puerto Ricans included in the "professional census category" had in 1969 median earnings which were almost 35% less than those of the total population, probably, although this is pure speculation, even 40% less than the Whites included in such category.

A brief examination of the specific categories will show that in the case of "teachers" the median earnings of the Puerto Ricans was 72.48% that of the total male population, that in the case of lawyers and physicians the comparison could not be made because Puerto Rican "lawyers" were reported as earning \$12,472, the "Physicians" \$9,273, while the "lawyers" in the total population reported median earnings of \$15,000 or more, as the "physicians" in the total population also did. And so forth... Ironically enough, the only case in which the Puerto Ricans reported higher median earnings than the total population was that of "religious workers" but after all, they are professionals.

OPERATIVES' EXCEPT TRANSPORT:

Of all the Puerto Rican males in the CLF (Civilian Labor Force) in NYSMSA in 1969, 22.57% were classified as Operatives. Among the corresponding White population, 8.15% were classified as such. In New Jersey State, 36.89% of the all the Puerto Rican males in the CLF (Civilian Labor Force) in '69 were included under this occupational category.

Operatives

	PR/NYSMSA	W/NYSMSA	PR/NJ
TOTAL	36,601	202,570	10,914
% of CLF	22.57	8.15	36.89
% within operative	100.00	100.00	100.00
Other specified			
op.	24.53	31.21	19.77
Misc. N.E. op.	36.16	24.89	39.25

And these are only a few examples, not even a sketch of the conditions of the Puerto Rican male working force. The situation of the Puerto Rican women is even worse but at this time we will not go into it.

According to the U.S. Census of 1970, 36% of all the Puerto Ricans in the U.S., more than half a million people, lived below the poverty line. . . There is no need to go on describing, in a thousand and one more ways, the situation of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. The obvious question is how can it be changed? How can this situation of injustice and inhumanity be transformed?

For us the answer is obvious. Our hopes as a nationality within the U.S., our future is intimately related to that of the working class in this country, to the proletarian revolution. It is linked with the outcome of the struggle to to destroy the capitalist system and to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in this country.

The answer requires some explanation. It is based on the recognition of the class character of the State and the bourgeoisie democracy as well as in the understanding that the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are objectively part of the proletariat, of the working class of this country and as such, their class interest is the same.

Let's discuss very briefly the class character of bourgeoisie democracy. The science of historical materialism has taught us that "the state is the product and the manifestation of irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises when, where, and to the extent that class antagonisms objectively cannot be reconciled". (Lenin; State and Revolution) Furthermore it establishes that "the state is an organ of class rule for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of "order", which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes" (idem). In this respect the bourgeois state is the instrument of the exploiting system for suppressing and oppressing the working people. The Democrat and Republican parties have been throughout their existence political parties of the bourgeoisie, upholders of the class interests of that particular class. The Puerto Ricans can expect from those political parties as well as the Revisionist Communist Party, the same thing as the rest of the working class in this country; nothing.



Among the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. a new political animal has appeared, the Puerto Rican politiquero, affiliated to these parties. Politiqueros who exploit their "puertoricaness" as a way to obtain the support of the Puerto Rican communities in the different cities, prophets of cultural narcissism who foster false hopes among our people of transforming their situation through the very same system of exploitation which is its cause. As such, they become instruments of bourgeoisie domination.

The second issue, that of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. as part of the working class in this country has by far more important consequences.

As a migrant group, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. have left their nation of origin and have been incorporated into the socio-economic structure of another nation. The material reality of Puerto Ricans in the United States, the conditions under which they exist and are developing, are those of North American capitalist society with all its principal and particular contradictions. Puerto Ricans participate in the economic, social, politica and, even, cultural life of this country. Puerto Ricans are effectively integrated into the process of economic production carried out in the different areas and regions where they are concentrated. In composition, Puerto Ricans in the U.S., are predominantly a working class people, a national group whose majority belong to the working class of the U.S.

By stating that the majority of the Puerto Rican people in the U.S. are, objectively an integral part of the proletariat in this country, does not mean that there are no differences, or particularities, which distinguish Puerto Rican workers from the rest of the working class. To deny these particularities, not to acknowledge them, is as erroneous, as a, absurd as the mistaken position which raises these particularities to a level of central contradiction and leads to maintaining the position that Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are integrated into the working class of Puerto Rico.

Firstly, it is necessary to establish that a Puerto Rican nation does not exist in the U'S' but rather a Puerto Rican nationality. The concept of nation is a historical category which arises in the stage of rising capitalism, according to Stalin's definition: " A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the



basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make up manifested in a common culture." (Marxism and the National Question, P. 68 Calcutta Book House). The Puerto Rican people in the U.S. share- in varying degrees and in accordance to the extent of their incorporation into this society- common cultural elements, a common language and psychological make-up, and shared historical experiences and patterns of association. But, as one generation follows another, the assimilation of elements of the proletarian and dominant culture becomes more pronounced. This is evident in the phenomena we could label "cultural syncretism" in which cultural forms from both North American and Puerto Rican cultures are combined to create a new order of cultural elements. The existence and/or survival and transformation of these elements of nationality constitute one of the distinctive characteristics of this sector of the proletariat in the U.S. They are workers, yes, but Puerto Rican workers.

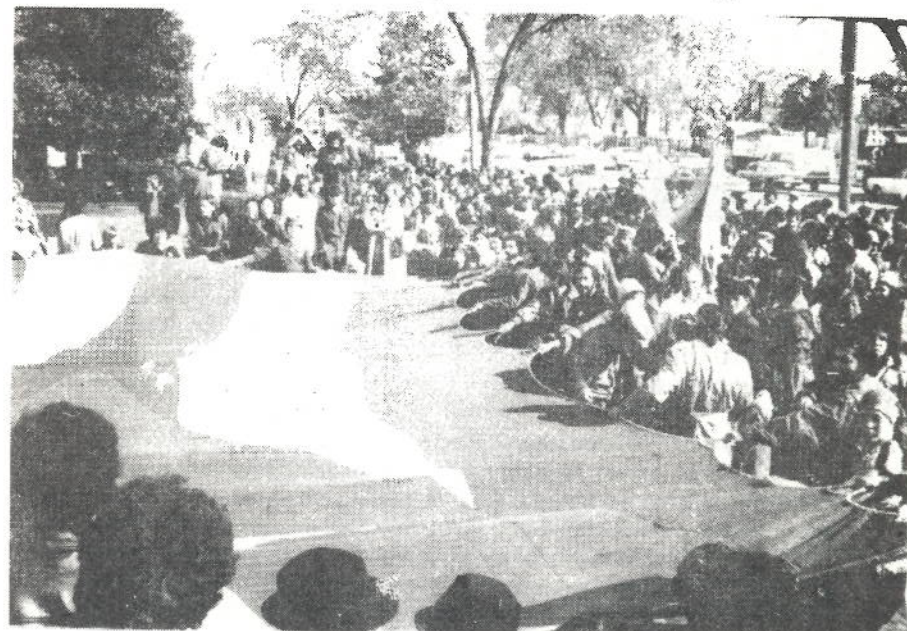
Secondly, if we take into consideration that the majority, around 70%, of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. over 20, or rather the majority of the Puerto Rican workers in this country, were born in Puerto Rico, we can much more clearly understand the reason why the feeling and sense of nationality is manifested with such vitality and force and why it is so present in all areas of life of the Puerto Rican. Therefore, if on one hand, as we stated earlier the material reality (the conditions of life in which the Puerto Ricans find themselves in the U.S.) defines the Puerto Rican as part of the working class in this country; in addition, we can maintain that in more than one way the social and psychological make-up of the migrant group corresponds in its fundamental aspects to its class, in the social context of Puerto Rico, at the time of the migration. The social being determines the social consciousness, but this relationship is not established automatically or by magic. The Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. is predominantly one of the rural proletariat that, initially, during the first three decades of the century and as a result of the transformation which occurred in the system of production and property during that period, emigrated to the urban centers in Puerto Rico or remained as a potential migrant group. When emigrated in mass to the industrial centers in the northeast of the U.S., at the end of the decade of the '40's and the beginning of the '50's, the political forms of political struggle and the collective experience which the Puerto Rican brought to the U.S. were those they brought from Puerto Rico.

The process of proletarianization of the Puerto Rican people in the U.S. involves, among other things, the transformation of the social consciousness of this group, the incorporation of cultural elements of the proletarian and dominant culture previously mentioned, and the redefinition- in the context of a new social base- of the sense of nationality.

Finally, it is necessary to mention a third factor which contributed to the sense of nationality among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. This is the national oppression to which this group is subject. Most Puerto Ricans in the U.S. live in conditions of poverty. They earn the lowest wages comparable only to those of Black Workers. The level

of unemployment among Puerto Ricans is more than twice that of white North Americans. The housing conditions in which they are forced to live, the lack of adequate health services, the humiliation and harassment which they experience daily, the inadequate educational institutions, these and other conditions of oppression and discrimination strengthen the sense of unity and solidarity, of a common struggle, among the Puerto Ricans. Added to this oppression, the expressions of white and national chauvinism work to perpetuate the divisions within the working class by pitting one nationality against the other thereby perpetuating the rule of the bourgeoisie by impeding the unification of the working class, a necessary condition for the radical and complete elimination of capitalist exploitation.

A clear understanding of the relationship between the sense of nationality and the material conditions to which the immigrants are integrated, that of U.S. society, is of utmost importance if the voluntary unity of the working class in the U.S. is to be achieved. On one hand, it is necessary to develop organizational forms and types of political activity which may facilitate, and, in some cases, allow the effective incorporation of the Puerto Ricans in the United States to the proletarian struggle in this nation. On the other hand, we have to oppose the petty- bourgeois nationalism, masqueraded as socialism, which continuously emphasizes national differences, fans chauvinism and raises nationality over and above class struggle- thereby contributing to the division and fragmentation of the working class. This is the case with the Puerto Rican Socialist Party's (P.S.P.) conception of the revolutionary tasks of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S., it is based on an incorrect and idealist understanding of the relationship and differences between nation and nationality and the relationship of the class struggle to the national struggles.



To define the Puerto Ricans in the United States as "forced residents" or as "eternal" migrants which is the definition given by P.S.P., is to accept only one aspect of the historical experience of this group, i.e. the fact that the emigration to the U.S. was caused, was forced, by the imperialist exploitation of the Puerto Rican Nation. This is true and cannot be denied. But when this truth is isolated from other aspects of the same historical phenomena, when it is presented as the sole element in the process, it becomes a half-truth, a rhetorical argument. Yes, the Puerto Ricans were forced to migrate, and they came to the U.S. but their experience does not end there. We had to earn our existence daily in this country, and in providing for it we had to sell, every day, the only thing we had left, our labor force, our work. We were subjected to the same system of institutionalized theft, of exploitation, as those who worked next to us, as those who lived where we did. In that circumstance, we had to fight for our rights, against the discrimination and abuses which we, as well as many others in this country, confronted daily. In order to secure the minimum, to guarantee our existence as human beings, we had to unite with others who, irrespective of race or nationality, were in the same social and economic conditions and faced the same obstacles, the same enemy, the bourgeoisie.



Our past experience has been an anticipation of the future. As part of the working class in the U.S. we understand that our liberation can only come about through the struggles, strength and resources of our class against the bourgeoisie. The intensification of these struggles will complement rather than hinder the National Liberation of Puerto Rico. Within this context, the existence of a true Proletarian Party, a Communist Party, is essential. It is our understanding that in order to build such an organization it needs a solid foundation, which is its materialist cadres, free of the dogma and idealism which permeates our revolutionary organizations. The creation of materialist cadres is presently a fundamental task within our organization, we hope to make this a contribution to what is coming into being, a true Marxist Leninist Party.