

Puerto Rican Independence Rally at Madison Square Garden

NEW YORK, October 30—Approximately 15,000 people attended a rally for Puerto Rican independence Sunday at Madison Square Garden. Scheduled to coincide with today's anniversary of the 1950 Nationalist uprising on the island, the event was dedicated to five Puerto Rican political prisoners (Rafael Cancel Miranda, Oscar Collazo, Andrés Figueroa, Irving Flores and Lolita Lebrón) who have languished in U.S. jails for more than 20 years.

The day before the rally, five banks in New York City were bombed, reportedly by a group calling itself the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN). A note left in a telephone booth demanded freedom for the Nationalist prisoners and immediate independence for Puerto Rico.

At the Garden the accent was on unity of all "progressives." The English slogan for the event was an appeal to liberal American nationalists: "For a Bi-Centennial without Colonies." (In Spanish there was a different theme: posters for the rally urged, "Boricua, defiende lo tuyo"—"Puerto Rican, defend what's yours"!)

The slant toward liberals was symbolized by the presence of two huge flags, U.S. and Puerto Rican, hanging from the ceiling. Red flags and the flag of the 1869 Lares revolt, traditional at *independentista* gatherings, were noticeably scarce.

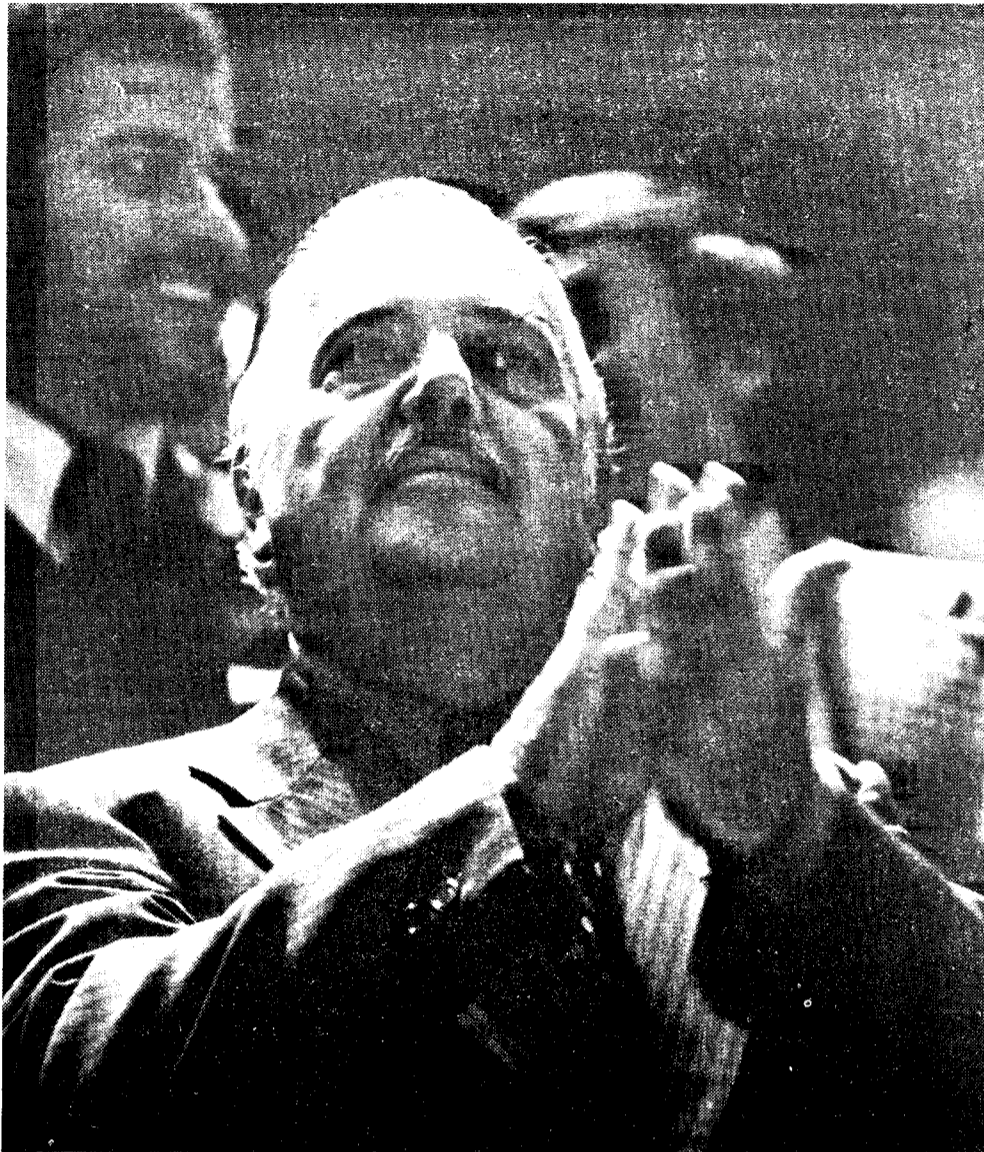
The speakers were selected to emphasize this note of "broad support." Most were uninspiring. Angela Davis noted that Cuba, too, was a small island while Jane Fonda appealed to the "great" traditions of the U.S. The problem, according to the entertainer, was the "policy of empire" which was "trying to create a consumer society in Vietnam."

The longest speaking time was allotted to Juan Mari Bras, general secretary of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), the organization which launched the Garden rally. His speech was appropriately toned down for the occasion, never even mentioning the U.S. working class or socialism in Puerto Rico! Questioned at a news conference about what kind of government he foresaw after independence, the PSP leader replied, "a republic."

A note of discord was struck by a Maoist speaker from the Asian Study Group who condemned "Soviet social-imperialism." This set off a loud chorus of boos, led by Stalinists and the PSP section of the audience, which drowned out the rest of his speech.

But the overall tone of the event was set by the long list of entertainers who paraded across an enormous red rug in the center of a hockey rink. Among them were Lucecita Benítez, Ray Barreto and Danny Rivera singing popular Puerto Rican songs. The Grupo Taoné from the island and El Grupo from New York added a note of protest, as did Holly Near who sang a number with the theme, "No, no, no—No more genocide." Pete Seeger gave a rendition of "Guantanamo."

The rally sponsors were so des-



PSP leader Juan Mari Bras

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perate to represent "all shades of opinion" that they invited N.Y. television commentator Geraldo Rivera who is detested by many *independentistas* and universally considered an opportunist. Sporting an expensive white suit and a T-shirt with the Puerto Rican flag, Rivera was booed both when he said he used to oppose independence and when he announced his conversion.

Proletarian Revolution or Liberal Protest

Trotskyists are the most consistent opponents of colonialism, defending the right of all oppressed nations to self-determination. We demand immediate, unconditional independence of Puerto Rico from the U.S. Communists are firm opponents of imperialism and struggle to unite workers of all countries. This can only be done by opposing all national oppression, the breeding ground for the bourgeois ideology of nationalism.

But it is the obligation of Marxists to warn that the feeble bourgeois independence forces will not achieve national liberation. It is necessary to mobilize the Puerto Rican and U.S. workers in struggle for their own class interests. The goal of such a seething social conflict cannot be limited to mere formal independence—postage stamps,

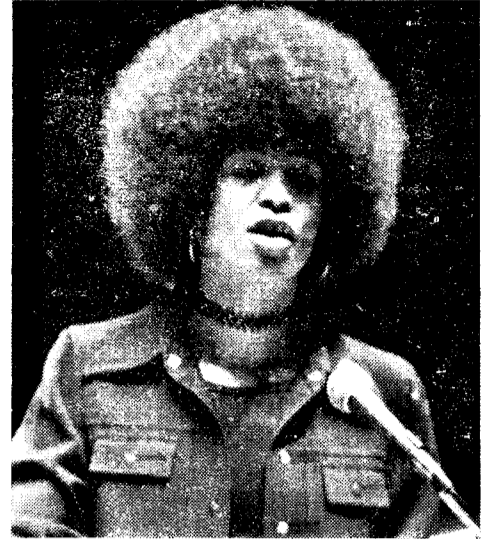
a flag and a native army to repress the masses.

Rather, the only program which can inspire the oppressed to heroic sacrifices is the promise of an end to their exploitation and misery. This requires the elimination of imperialist domination which can only come about through proletarian revolution, establishing a soviet Puerto Rico as part of a socialist federation of the Caribbean.

The PSP organizers of the October 27 rally were, in fact, quite careful to avoid the subject of socialist revolution (as were all the CP, Maoist, black nationalist and liberal speakers). In a pamphlet distributed at the Garden ("Puerto Ricans and Proletarian Internationalism," October 1974) El Comité, a New York Puerto Rican leftist group, reprinted its exchange of letters with the Puerto Rican Solidarity Day Committee.

El Comité had criticized the lack of any reference to socialism in rally propaganda as well as the "revisionist-liberal perspective" indicated by the speakers list. It suggested adding a pro-independence Puerto Rican socialist legislator, but the rally Committee turned this down.

The show-business spectacular quality of the event was widely criticized. One pamphlet distributed outside the hall ("El Martillo" which announces itself as the "clandestine publication"



Angela Davis

WV PHOTO



Jane Fonda

WV PHOTO

of the COR—Revolutionary Workers Committees) noted: "Compañero, anyone in our community will tell you that Lucecita Benítez, Danny Rivera, Ray Barreto, Jane Fonda and the other entertainers would fill the garden without calling it a day of solidarity. They have a following, a great following which is apolitical."

The respectable, festival atmosphere was not accidental. The PSP could have spent months building for a massive demonstration but chose not to. These reformists see the question not as one of organizing proletarian revolution but rather as a moral protest, which must "reach out" to liberals, on the model of the Vietnam peace crawls. Hence Geraldo Rivera; hence no mention of socialism or the U.S. working class.

This reformism is tied to Mari Bras' refusal to criticize the bank bombings, when questioned at the news conference. Undoubtedly, his response is partly due to the PSP's nationalist conception of "unity" of all pro-independence forces.

Marxists do, however, criticize individual terrorism, pointing out that it is no strategy for victory, that these are impotent acts of despair on the part of those who see no real possibility of united working-class struggle. (We also make clear that we defend leftist/nationalist terrorists against the imperialist state when their target is the class enemy and not random individuals.)

For the reformist/nationalist PSP, in contrast, the bombings are just another moral gesture. They are politically no different from the respectable Madison Square Garden spectacular or the PSP's annual pilgrimages to the United Nations.

Revolutionary Marxists know, even if Mari Bras and the PSP do not, that real national liberation can only be the product of victorious proletarian revolution, in which workers of the U.S. and the colony struggle jointly against the common enemy—capitalism in its period of imperialist decay. ■

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