

MSP/PSR Forum:

# Puerto Rico and the Present State of the Revolutionary Movement

*On July 25th M.I.N.P.-El Comité sponsored a public forum at which the Popular Socialist Movement (MSP) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, (PSR) both of Puerto Rico, gave their analysis of that country's current situation. The two organizations made a brief presentation since the emphasis of the forum was on questions and discussion with the audience. Below we reprint excerpts from both the presentation and the questions and answers. In the near future we will publish a full edited version of the forum in pamphlet form.*

**MSP/PSR:** We think that it is important to make as our starting point the economic situation in Puerto Rico and to discuss some of its implications. In the past, we have stated that Puerto Rico is undergoing a very profound economic crisis in which its productive apparatus has completely stagnated. However, the masses have not felt the full weight of this crisis because of the methods of crisis control that the U.S. has been using in P.R. These controls have taken the form of food stamps, transfers of federal funds, etc. These have been the basic elements of U.S. domination throughout this economic crisis... This does not mean that the Puerto Rican masses have not suffered from the crisis, but only that they have not suffered from it with all its weight.

These mechanisms of control have served to control the class struggle in that they have created and deepened our people's ideological and material dependence on U.S. imperialism. But given the present reality of the U.S. economy and the U.S. politics, there may be a decrease in this type of help for Puerto Rico. We have already begun to see the weakening of the food stamp program. From May to October, we lived a short crisis when there was the threat that we would have no more food stamps. Politicians in Puerto Rico almost committed suicide thinking of the implications of this threat in an election year...

We also want to discuss the implications of the Krepps Report which analyzes the economic crisis in Puerto Rico and makes recommendations on how to resolve it. Barceló's administration asked Washington to make this report because they thought it would strengthen their arguments for the viability of statehood. On the contrary however, Krepps report has been a big blow to the New Progressive Party (PNP) strategy. The report even presented certain recommendations that were made by the

Popular Democratic Party (PPD). These are two points regarding the economic crisis that we think have very important implications for the revolutionary movement in Puerto Rico.

Another point that we would like to discuss is the statehood offensive of the PNP. There is disagreement among the left forces as to the U.S. strategy regarding the solution to the status question. Our position is that although we see that there is an important sector that is pushing statehood for Puerto Rico, there continues to be a debate among the imperialist bourgeoisie and that as of yet they have not taken up a definite position on this question. There are sectors that favor neo-colonial independence, others that favor a modified commonwealth and others that favor statehood.

Originally the left forces thought that the PNP was going to win the elections in Puerto Rico by a wide margin which would reinforce their ability to push their strategy for statehood. But now we see, because of very concrete political mobilizations, demonstrations, the primaries, etc. that the Popular Party was not dead and that they did an impressive job with the Democratic primaries almost beating Barceló and the PNP in the Carter-Kennedy confrontation in Puerto Rico.

This series of elements indicate that the PNP is not as strong as it was a year before and that the PNP is not as weak as we had thought. At this moment, our organization, and I believe, many sectors of the left in Puerto Rico would say that the 1980 elections are a toss-up. This has serious implications for what has been put forward in terms of the 1980 plebiscite for statehood. It also has big implications for the Puerto Rican Independence Party's (PIP) outcome in the elections. PIP has been saying that they are going to come out of the process as the second political force confronting the PNP in 1984.

We also want to address the issue of the state of the left and of the revolutionary movement in Puerto Rico. Everytime someone comes to the U.S., they say that the left is weak and divided. This is basically true. There has been a period of fragmentation of the left forces since 1976. However, we should analyze what are the bases for these differences. Our organization understands these differences to reflect a struggle between the tendencies of Marxism-Leninism and those petty-bourgeois nationalist forces who have historically given leadership to Puerto Rico's independence struggle. In an-



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alyzing this division, we ask these questions: Is this a permanent type of division or is it just a manifestation of the left's inability to achieve unity? Is there in fact a class struggle inside the left, a struggle reflecting two different ideological and political perspectives? Has a crisis of leadership of the petty-bourgeois nationalist forces created a vacuum that the Marxist-Leninist forces, because of their lack of consolidation and development, have not been able to fill? We believe we should discuss these questions because they address a serious debate among the forces that do solidarity work with Puerto Rico. . .

**Question:** *I don't know much about the decrease in food stamps that you mentioned before. could you discuss that in more detail?*

**Answer:** There is a real possibility that cuts in the food stamp program will take place in early 1981. Actually, the debate in Congress raised the possibility of cutting the funds not only in Puerto Rico but in other states of the union as well.

Overall, with the rise of the conservative



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ceptions of the petty-bourgeois nationalist forces. To address this question, we should try to make a brief analysis of how we see the situation in Puerto Rico, and what is the basis for this fragmentation and lack of unity.

Basically, the left in Puerto Rico is going through a transition which has to do with the crisis of the major petty-bourgeois forces. We are talking of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP). In 1976, this party had a big crisis acknowledged both by themselves and other forces in the left. Although up until 1976, our struggle gave the impression of being in a flow going from victory to victory, in 1976, this impression exploded like a big balloon. As a result of this failure there has been a tendency by the forces like the PSP to move further toward reformist electoral politics as a way of advancing the struggle, as opposed to grass roots organizing or inserting themselves in the mass struggle.

At the same time, we believe that another sector which has some of the same political and ideological conceptions would say that the problem of the independence movement was that its leadership was basically reformist in character. These groups, which the compañero referred to as the underground, have differences between themselves but do basically agree on one point that defines their politics—that armed struggle is a fundamental way of struggling in Puerto Rico at this stage. According to them, those in favor of their conceptions are revolutionaries, and those who are not in favor are reformists.

To our knowledge, these groups have not stated their strategy for Revolution in Puerto Rico nor their tactics for the movement. They have not put forth their politics of alliances nor have they defined the character of the revolution. They have not defined which is the principal class, the leading force in the process. They believe that Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are a nation and don't have the conception of national minorities being part of the U.S. working class. We believe that although there are important differences among these groups, they generally reflect a petty-bourgeois nationalist tendency of the left in opposition to a petty-bourgeois nationalist tendency of the right which is represented by the P.S.P.

There is a class struggle and a political and ideological struggle within the revolutionary left that we define as a struggle between the Marxist-Leninist forces and the petty-bourgeois nationalist forces. We believe that the underground organizations have arisen and multiplied in Puerto Rico in reaction of a sector of the petty-bourgeois nationalists who do not understand the reasons for the present stagnation of the struggle nor do they have a long-range perspective of the slow process of developing of mass work. They do not understand the conception of linking with the working class, forging cadres, and building a party that can give leadership to that process.

They think that the basic problem of the left is its inability to strike at imperialism and to create a revolutionary force. They are seeking a short path towards revolution in Puerto Rico. We believe, however, that insofar as the conditions and development of the mass struggle start to change, these forces will have to adjust their strategies so that they may insert themselves in the mass struggle and give it leadership based upon a clear class perspective. Otherwise, they will be doomed to disappear.

This is the situation of the left as we see it. These are three basic tendencies. We see two as major deviations in the left and the third as a Marxist-Leninist tendency that is slowly developing. Marxist-Leninist forces are a minority in the revolutionary movement because petty-bourgeois nationalism is still the predominant force. However, our historical perspective plus our practice in the last few years demonstrates to us that the Marxist-Leninist tendency is rising slowly but surely.

**Question:** *Could you talk about the concrete and immediate tasks of the left now in Puerto Rico . . . ?*

**Answer:** We define three major tasks in our central perspective: first, to link ourselves with the most advanced sectors of the working class and insert ourselves in the strategic sectors of the economy; secondly, to consolidate the theoretical formation of our cadres as a practical as well as theoretical task; and thirdly, to push forward the ideological debate by clarifying the political lines and platforms, programs and conceptions of the revolutionary left. Concretely, this would mean work in trade unions to create rank and file committees and study circles. It would mean developing the most advanced sectors of the working class and recruiting them to our organization or to what we call workers' commissions. These commissions would not only be rank and file commissions in the sense of trade union work, but would function as political organizations of the working class in the factories which would give direction to the workers' struggles.

This means that we have to develop propaganda to workers in the factories. We are beginning to take Marxist ideas some very concretely defined sectors of the working class that we understand as strategic sectors of our economy—pharmaceuticals, electronics, the big unions, workers of the public sector like the water resource company, the electrical energy company, the telephone company, etc. Therefore, when we talk about linking ourselves to the strategic sectors, this means engaging in daily work of propaganda, education, and organization among the masses. We don't speak of *inserting* ourselves in the struggle because at present, there is no such struggle of the masses taking place in Puerto Rico, but we have to develop the conditions to push that struggle forward. . . .

and right forces in the U.S., there has been a general tendency developing to cut back on all social service programs. This is not only a problem of Democrats or Republicans. It's not a Carter vs. Reagan issue. It reflects a general tendency of how to deal with the economic crisis of U.S. capitalism.

We believe that the U.S. is not in an economic position to sustain or increase Puerto Rico's dependency on food stamps. Either they cut hospitals, schools, and social services in New York, Detroit, and Chicago in order to maintain the level of aid to Puerto Rico or they start cutting in Puerto Rico. Either way, they are going to have problems. . . .

**Question:** *You spoke of the crisis in the left in terms of its fragmentation. Why is this happening? Could you also speak on the crisis of the petty-bourgeois nationalists that you referred to and the effect of the underground movement on Puerto Rico?*

**Answer:** I would like to clarify that I did not state that there is a crisis in the left in Puerto Rico but rather, a crisis in the leadership and the political and ideological con-