



ALBIZU CAMPOS
and the
PONCE
MASSACRE

by Juan Antonio Corretjer

Thirty-five Cents



Juan Antonio Corretjer

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Juan Antonio Corretjer is one of the Old Guard of Puerto Rico's anti-Yankee revolution, and at the same time a prophet and fighter for the country's revolutionary future.

The national secretary of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party at the time of imperialism's Ponce Massacre, he went to a U.S. prison along with Albizu Campos, that party's president, in 1937 and served

six years of a ten-year term. The remaining time he was under parole in New York City and barred from visiting his native land.

In 1934 he had borne arms in the Cuban revolution against dictator Machado. (A revolutionary "junta" took power from Machado, but a traitor-member of the junta, strong in the army, was able to defeat the other members later, and with the backing of the U.S., set up his own dictatorship. His name was Batista.)

Today, Senor Corretjer leads the Socialist League of Puerto Rico, a Marxist-Leninist organization which solidarizes with Fidel Castro and predicts that the Puerto Rican struggle for independence will to a large degree follow the Cuban example.

His party is based on the working class, and his ideas for Puerto Rican liberation are rooted in Marxism. While he sees the road to Puerto Rican independence going at the same time to socialism, he has nothing in common with those pseudo-Marxists who say there can be no independence for Puerto Rico until the U.S. is socialist. (And then, they say, no independence will be necessary!)

He is a vigorous man in his middle fifties respected by all shades of radical and nationalist opinion in Puerto Rico and much loved by his friends and followers. He resides with his wife, Consuelo, in Guaynabo (very near to San Juan). He edits "Pabellon" (the organ of the Socialist League), the newsletter, "Quincena" and other literary material.

INTRODUCTION

The Ponce Massacre is little known to North Americans but long remembered by Puerto Ricans who love their country.

The story must have been told many times in Spanish. But it seems to us that this is the most complete account in English--at least in recent years. Of course, this event is not included in any official history and needless to say, the public school system of Puerto Rico does not include it in its curriculum -- in either Spanish or English. The lengthy New York obituaries at the death of Albizu Campos on April 21, 1965 are replete with the accounts of his alleged "terrorism," but singularly forgetful about the U.S. terror against his unarmed followers at Ponce.

The present pamphlet contains the story of the massacre itself and in addition, pins the responsibility where it belongs: on Yankee imperialism, led at that time by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The necessarily abridged comments of the author about the Nationalist Party and its great leader, Albizu Campos, are an indispensable guide to the understanding of the larger Puerto Rican liberation struggle as well as the massacre of 1937. The same goes for the author's brief recapitulation of the decades of Yankee tyranny.

There will be those North Americans who wonder why the massacre of 1937 is so important today in the light of the much bloodier events that now shake the world and why this pamphlet should be on their required reading list when the 28-year-old atrocity has paled before the more recent crimes of Hiroshima, Sharpeville, Stanleyville and Vietnam. The importance lies mainly in the relationship of the U.S. rulers to the ruled and in the fact that the U.S. treatment of its "own" colony gives the clue to its real intentions in Africa, Asia, etc.

The story is especially important to the understanding of the role of imperialist liberalism.

Engineered by appointees of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the very heyday of the "Good Neighbor" era inaugurated by that liberal President, the massacre tells us volumes about the true nature of FDR's liberalism--and imperialist liberalism in general. (Since FDR was the very model and prototype of imperialist liberalism!)

Those who have been brought up in the aura of Roosevelt's alleged friendship to labor, his "humanitarianism" etc., may not easily believe Senor Corretjer's story of Roosevelt's involvement and responsibility in this classical act of colonial repression.

The workers of the Republic Steel Company in Chicago during that same year of 1937, however, had occasion to question Roosevelt's dedication to the cause of labor and would have readily understood Roosevelt's responsibility for the Ponce Massacre had they known even a few of the facts.

On Memorial Day of that year, a peaceful parade of unarmed steelworkers trying to organize a union, was fired upon by policemen. Without provocation, in broad daylight, these cops killed ten marchers and wounded scores of others.

Roosevelt was asked to make a statement condemning the slaughter and he cheered the widows and orphans with the often-quoted remark: "A plague on both your houses!" (i.e. the houses of capital and labor). John L. Lewis, then head of the militant C I O, publicly condemned Roosevelt for this and all but broke with him. Lewis well understood that beneath an apparently intemperate and thoughtless brutality on Roosevelt's part was a calculated and deliberate signal to the U. S. ruling class that his "pro-labor" bias went just so far and no farther.

Now Roosevelt's callousness to the massacred steelworkers did not materially affect his popularity in other quarters. And the myth of his great benefactions to labor was rather fortified in later years (mostly by the leadership of the same labor movement he tamed and so to speak, "legalized"). Both liberals and reactionaries, each in their own way and each with their own reasons, continued to build up Roosevelt's reputation.

But the point is that if Roosevelt could get away with such an attitude in the case of workers in Chicago, how much easier it was for him to do so in the case of distant and "foreign" Puerto Rico -- even though his complicity was much greater!

Puerto Rico was an open colony of the U.S. at that time without even the fig leaf of commonwealth status or the euphemistic subtitle of "Free Associated State." Few North Americans paid any attention to it. And most of those who did were chauvinists and racists who regarded Puerto Ricans as automatically inferior to "Americans."

The man now occupying the White House is now organizing a far bigger massacre in Vietnam than Roosevelt's henchmen did in Puerto Rico. He would be no less ready than Roosevelt to massacre Puerto Ricans if they should, like the Vietnamese, choose freedom.

It is partly in the hope of preventing such an eventuality that this pamphlet has been written for the North American public. The Puerto Ricans will fight as bravely for their independence as any other nation on earth when their time comes. But the active sympathy of all progressives in the United States is clearly a key requirement for the freedom of this little country, virtually occupied as it is by U.S. troops and often surrounded by U.S. battleships.

At the moment, it is true, the freedom struggle in Puerto Rico does not indicate any immediate large-scale drive for independence. But as the author says, "What is real is often not visible."

This is not a statement of faith in mysticism, but an assertion of the profound driving forces of liberation which move beneath man's consciousness, so to speak, and only push their way to the surface--to the "visible"--on special occasions.

These special occasions are known to history as *revolutions*. The Puerto Rican revolution is not now so visible as it was just prior to March 21, 1937. But it is real, nevertheless, and it will win in spite of everything.

VINCENT COPELAND

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MEET BOLIVAR

On sunny Palm Sunday afternoon, a young Puerto Rican dragged his dying body over the hot pavement of a Ponce Street. It was March 21, 1937. Summoning all his strength, he reached the sidewalk. His finger moistened in his blood, he wrote:

"Viva la Republica!
Abajo los asesinos!"

He was one of 21 who were dying at this same moment. His name was Bolivar: Bolivar Marquez. The coincidence of names evokes Neruda's poem:

I met Bolivar on a long morning...
"Father," I said, "Are you, or are you not, or
who are you?"

And he said:
"I rise every hundred years when the people wake up."

oOo

Around Bolivar Marquez, rifle and machine gun fire were wounding 150 more -- men, women, children. This was the Ponce Massacre.

Was this happening in a social vacuum?

It was not.

oOo

A good understanding of the events reported here requires a previous knowledge of the general environment, historical and social as well as political, in which they took place.

The general background was the impact of the 1929 crash of American capitalism on a country -- Puerto Rico -- which since 1898 had been cynically deprived of political sovereignty and brutally exploited by American vested interests under the protection of the military, the cordial consent of the 'democratic alliance' for colonialism (U.S.A., Britain, France, Holland, Belgium, etc.), the traitorous policy of the Latin American governments, the impotent sympathy of the Latin American people, and the tragic ignorance or indifference of the international Left.

Moreover, to underline this general panorama, something of paramount importance must be added. What U.S. imperialism had and has been pursuing in Puerto Rico is not merely deprivation of sovereignty, but the destruction of Puerto Rico as a Spanish American nation.

By the 1930's, the anti-Puerto Rican offensive had penetrated deeply. Yet, due to this same penetration, the Puerto Rican forces for a counter-attack developed. The instrument which shaped these forces from out of colonial chaos was the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico. Its leader was Pedro Albizu Campos.

DISORGANIZATION OF THE ECONOMY

In 1900, Senator Foraker made the following statement in Congress: 'The sugar and tobacco trusts are already practically the owners of all sugar and all tobacco in Puerto Rico.' (Congressional Record, Vol. 33, Part 3, Page 2649.)

But just one year earlier, 93 per cent of all the farms (consisting of 91 per cent of all the land in Puerto Rico) were the property of those who lived on them. The size of the average farm was 45 acres. Coffee was the main product, and there were 21 sugar centrals and 249 individual sugar-raising farms.

The use of Puerto Rican money (which was then at par with the American dollar) was abolished in 1899 and United States currency substituted on the basis of 60 U.S. cents for one peso. Thus were the Puerto Ricans robbed of 40 per cent of their money by a simple order of the Government of the United States.

At the time, coffee was the economic mainstay of the Island, which exported 58 million pounds. The coffee planters, encouraged by a consistent demand for their product in Europe during the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, had gone into an orgy of production. They mortgaged their properties in order to buy more land, and the change of currency automatically increased their

mortgage burden.

The San Ciriaco Hurricane of August 8, 1898, had devastated the coffee country, and it was on this main sector of the economy that the forty per cent loss in currency fell heaviest. To recover from this double blow, a proposition was made by the Puerto Ricans to borrow several million dollars, to be loaned through the banks for private needs of the Island. This was incorporated in a bill presented to the Executive Council (created by the invaders and composed of six Americans and five Puerto Ricans, all named by the President of the United States) with the primary purpose of increasing money circulation in the Island; but it was generally understood to be a plan for aiding the coffee planters whose estates had been ruined by the cyclone of August, 1898. The bill was twice defeated by a solid American vote. With the coffee crop fallen from 50 million pounds to five million and the value from \$10,000,000 to \$600,000, and a coincidental fall of the price of coffee in the world markets, the disaster reached every Puerto Rican home. It was a death blow to the coffee economy, whose breakdown effectively achieved the economic disorganization pursued by American imperialism in behalf of its investors. The ruin of the industry, which afforded work to more than half the population, was only one dramatic effect of the ruin that devaluation of the local currency brought about.

Losing their properties, the planters were forced to migrate to the cities where they added to the prevailing bureaucratic servitude and political cynicism. The coffee workers followed them and were forced to squat on the outskirts of urban communities, giving rise to the malodorous slums still in existence to this day.

North American capital began invading Puerto Rico. The tobacco and sugar industries, protected by the tariff, were among the first to be expanded. Sugar displaced coffee as Puerto Rico's dominant industry, its fortune linked with the U.S. tariff. Plantation-factories making moscovado sugar on individual estates gave way to modern sugar centrales where cane sugar from thousands of acres could be ground. By 1900, the twenty-two centrales and the 249 individual haciendas reported in 1899 had been merged into forty-one highly modernized (80 per cent U.S.-owned) sugar centrales.

The workingman's lot became worse. As a result of the economic dislocation under the domination of an invading imperialist army, and as a result of the substitution of one ruling class by another, there followed the total deprivation of the masses.

An accomplice of imperialism in the camp of labor, Samuel Gompers,

(then President of the American Federation of Labor) fearful of an explosion, could not but observe in 1904:

“ The salaries being paid now in Puerto Rico are 50 per cent under those that were paid under Spanish rule in most of the industries and in agriculture, and sometimes less. The price of meat is impossible for workers, being higher than it was under the Spaniards. Rice is also expensive, so expensive that to many unhappy workers it has become a delicacy.”

The high price of meat might also be traced to the fantastically criminal concept of Nineteenth Century theoreticians of British-American imperialism, which asserted that a people with a low diet of meat was necessarily docile and, of course, easy to deal with. Puerto Rican cattle were bought at a conqueror's price and shipped away, especially to Texas, with the inevitable shortage of meat in the market and the promotion of imported codfish and canned foods to the Puerto Rican table.

In the 1930's, when the wave of disaster brought to the world by the U.S. crash of October, 1929, swept over Puerto Rico, our country had been under its impact even earlier. Capitalism first inflicts its crisis upon the colonial peoples before it throws the crisis on its own working class. This crisis found a Puerto Rico that for years had been submitted to a one-crop latifundia absentee economy and to American monopoly in commerce.

We had, at the time, 55,519 farms and 52.9 per cent of the total number of farms were less than ten acres in size. They occupied 7.6 per cent of the total farm area, 10.6 per cent of the cultivated land, and their worth amounted to 6.9 per cent of the total value of all lands, buildings, agricultural implements and machinery of all the country's farms.

Three hundred forty-two farms, that is to say, 0.6 per cent of all farms, consisted of 500 or more acres, accounting for 30.9 per cent of the total farm area and 25.8 per cent of land under cultivation. They represented 44.1 per cent of the value of all land and agricultural implements and machinery of the total farming area of the country.

Seventy per-cent of the population lived in the countryside: over 230,000 families consisting of 1,302,898 people. *Over eighty per-cent of the families living in the rural areas were landless; they were the families of workers living on a salary, agregados, (a semi-feudal relationship or peonage).*

A few years later (1941-2), with 70,000 men in the Army and an increase in the construction of military public works, “ the coefficient derived from a study of 4,999 workers' families in Puerto Rico was 218 persons working for every 1 000 inhabitants”, counting even those working for a living who were between ten and fourteen years old. Sixty per cent of the workers were jobless!

The 1940 census accordingly showed a drop between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four--the most productive period in the life of laborers--a characteristic which was not present in the 1899 census. This was attributed to tuberculosis which, in 1936, was killing 305 out of every 1,000 Puerto Ricans.

THE CULTURAL TENSION

A public school system was organized in Puerto Rico in 1900 shaped after the one current in U.S. Army camps. The introduction to the text of the 1901 School Law of Puerto Rico, approved by Governor Allen, said: “The most important dispositions of the Military Orders are here embodied”. So English, not Spanish, was the official language in the schools. The military heroes and deeds of the armed forces of the United States were presented to Puerto Rican children as their own, and even foreign languages were taught in English to a Spanish-speaking nation! Puerto Rican history was ignored: all relations of the Puerto Rican historical and cultural heritage with the Latin American sister nations was ignored. And the dislodging of all national consciousness was pursued with the cultivation of an inferiority complex as its fellow traveler.

In the year of 1937, the year of the Ponce Massacre, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed the following letter (the equivalent of a Tsarist ukase) to his underling, the Commissioner of Education of Puerto Rico:

“I desire at this time to make clear the attitude of my administration in the extremely important matter of teaching English in Puerto Rico. It is an indispensable part of American policy that the coming generation of American citizens in Puerto Rico grow up with complete facility in the English tongue. It is the language of our nation. It is only through familiarity with our language that the Puerto Ricans will be able to take full advantage of the economic opportunities which became available to them when they were made American citizens.

“Bilingualism will be achieved by the forthcoming generations of Puerto Ricans only if teaching of English throughout the insular educational system is entered into at once with vigor, purposefulness and devotion, and with the understanding that English is the

official language of our country.''

This despotism over Puerto Rico's cultural life reached into all educational spheres. In the very year of the Ponce Massacre, this tyrannical order was delivered by the President of the United States, and General Winship imported one hundred Americans to teach English in the Puerto Rican grade schools.

PERSECUTION

Early in 1932, the usual government "observation" of the pro-independence groups began to be transformed into provocation and persecution. The first of these provocations of really great magnitude was made through the colonial legislature where Gompers' associate, Santiago Iglesias, on petition of Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., introduced a bill to convert the Puerto Rican national flag to a colonial banner. *A people's mass attack on the colonial capitol building left one killed, dozens wounded.*

The registration period (it was an election year) was marked by violence everywhere. Provocation against the Independentistas (Nationalists and Liberals) was the order of the day.

With the intensification of the Independentista movement came new persecutions. The credit for initiating modern, streamlined methods of political persecution in Puerto Rico belongs to Mr. Ernest Gruening.*

In March, 1936, Gruening sent off a series of letters to influential Americans on the Island, requesting confidential information concerning any anti-American activity in general and specifically within the National Guard and at the University. One of the most "documented" informers of Mr. Gruening was Atherton Lee, Director of the Federal Experimental station in Mayaguez. At Mr. Gruening's request, two special agents from the Division of Investigation of the Department of the Interior were sent to Puerto Rico and, on his request also, the FBI extended its activities to our country.

The Department of the Interior men were to investigate Independentista infiltration of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRAA). Under Governor Winship's instructions, the Legislature named a special investigating commission with the same task. Under Gruening's orders, a "test on independence" was established.

When this question hit the press (*El Mundo* in San Juan and through this, the *New York Times*), Gruening double-talked that "The PRAA

* Ernest Gruening--Was Director of Division of Territories and Island Possessions. Famous liberal. Now US Senator from Alaska.

does not propose to intervene in the beliefs of its employees even though those beliefs may occasionally appear to be in conflict with a minimum of common sense."

So it was Gruening also who inaugurated the theory of the intellectual emptiness of patriotism. In his anti-independence campaign, as in every other one of his activities in Puerto Rico, Gruening was (as Secretary Ickes declared) responsible only to the President of the United States. And it is revealing that in his mistrust of everything and everybody in Puerto Rico, the only exception he made was General Blanton Winship, the great assassin at the Ponce Massacre, *who was also responsible only and directly to the president of the United States.* His appointment to the Division of Territories and Island Possessions, which was so much acclaimed by American liberals, led Albizu Campos to remark, "Puerto Rico is the graveyard of American liberalism." (This is just as true of Franklin Roosevelt as it is of Gruening.)

Not happy with such lackeys of American policy as Dr. Jose Padin, the Commissioner of Education appointed by President Roosevelt, a similar secret investigation of the Department of Education was taking place. The situation forced Padin's resignation in November, 1936. It was Dr. Gruening who presented the resignation letter to President Roosevelt and who secured immediate acceptance from him.

A similar "cleaning up" operation against suspected Independentistas was being carried on throughout the whole colonial government apparatus.

All this tends to show that the independence movement was strong and growing. Let us turn now to the general political development of the 30's. The protagonist of this development was the Nationalist Party which became the center that attracted the main weight of the repression.

THE NATIONALIST PARTY

The Nationalist Party had been organized for several years without becoming a significant group. It did become just that in May, 1930, when Pedro Albizu Campos, backed by the Party's youth (he was 39 years of age) was elected president.

Under Albizu's leadership it rapidly developed into a real revolutionary vanguard attempting to show the way out of the reigning misery and chaos. Thanks mainly to imperialist maneuvering, intimidation, and bribery, but also to clear-cut class and sectional differentiations, it always remained small in numbers. But its influence reached far beyond its organized force. It was, in reality, a powerful mass movement.

This could not have happened without the situation we have described. But the importance of the leadership should not be underestimated. Albizu came forward as the movement's brilliant and courageous leader at a moment when the influx of the people into the independence movement required precisely such brilliant and courageous leadership. The pitiless persecution he has suffered ever since has been the highest recognition of this fact. That he did not succeed in leading Puerto Rico into independence could not be charged to any incapacity on his part.

Somewhere else I have pointed out that during the two different periods of his leadership Albizu led the independence movement during two corresponding periods of imperialist development and world reaction: first during the period of the rise of fascism and then during the period when U. S. imperialism reached the summits of atomic monopoly power. These two periods were from May, 1930, when he was elected his party's president, to June 7, 1937, when he entered the Atlanta Penitentiary, and from December 15, 1947, when he came back home, to November 2, 1950, when he was again taken into custody.

In this particularly difficult situation, his party and his leadership were additionally crippled by the absence of a regularly developed Marxist movement in Puerto Rico. It was too late in Puerto Rican history for the national bourgeoisie to take the full leadership --most of it was already compromised by collaboration with the foreign oppressor--and the lack of a Marxist ally accentuated the petty bourgeois shortcomings of the whole situation. Albizu himself, with all of his genius, was a bourgeois leader without a bourgeoisie to follow him.

A few facts about the Nationalist Party's mass character and vanguard role follow: Under its pressure, another and more conservative petty bourgeois party (the Liberal, later to be transformed into the Popular Party) was organized. In the 1932 election, the Popular Party gained thirty-six per cent of the electorate and in 1936, forty-eight per cent. Under the Nationalist Party's pressure, the Republican Party (traditionally a colonial appendage to the American G.O.P.) added "independence" to its program.

After a strong campaign of the Nationalists, the *Asociacion de Colonos de Cana** was organized. The Nationalists' campaign to expose

* An organization of small farmers. They own land, but are totally dependent on the big corporations' sugar "central" to get their cane ground and prepared for market. The central further dominates him by loaning him money on his crop in advance of his harvest.

and discredit Governor Colonel Theodore Roosevelt led to his removal in 1932.

In 1934, workers in the sugar fields went on a spontaneous strike. Shaking the shackles of the A.F.L., the workers at Fajardo (the Armstrong, New York, sugar empire which had been an A.F.L. stronghold since the start of the century) kicked out the collaborationist A.F.L. leaders and called Albizu to lead the strike to victory, which he did. Following this, Albizu led the whole industry strike into which the Fajardo outburst had spread.

Finally, with anti-Nationalist repression at its highest peak, the U. S. Court indicted Albizu Campos and seven other party leaders in April, 1936. And his followers raised thousands of dollars by collections of nickels and dimes from the broad masses and paid the million dollar bail on the very day of the indictment.

THE CADETS

The youth organization of the Nationalist Party was called the Army of Liberation--or Cadets of the Republic. They wore white pants, black shirts (symbolizing mourning for the country's colonial bondage), and overseas caps. Some of the battalions (groups, in reality, as there was no regularity in the numbers) used wooden rifles for drilling and parades.

Officers wore white pants and a white coat over a black shirt and a tie, and a regular officer's cap. They also used parade swords.

The girls' organization was called the Women's Auxiliary Corps, and their uniform was a skirt, blouse, and cap, with colors matching the uniform of the Cadets.

ALBIZU CAMPOS

Pedro Albizu Campos was born at Barrio de Tenerias, a rural area in the neighborhood of Ponce on "the Day of Saint Peter and Saint Paul", as he was fond of repeating, in 1891. He was seven years old when the U.S. invaders went through his native city late in July, 1898.

He received his early education in the public schools of Ponce, up to high school. At that time a scholarship offered to the brilliant teenager by the Logia Aurora (Ponce's Freemasons) enabled him to go to college at the University of Vermont.

It was during his studies at Vermont that two Harvard professors, while teaching a summer course there, took note of his talents. Because his scholarship did not cover his full college education, the Harvard

the Freemasonry scholarship that sent him to Vermont and who remained his friend to the last moment, Mr. Charles Terry. Others are the famed Ponce theosophist Don Andres Corazon; Don Rafael Rivera Esbri; the reknowned lawyer Don Rafael Marchand who was in third and fourth years of the Ponce high school while Albizu was in his first and second, and lawyer Guillermo Atilas Moreu, for many years of great regard among anti-Trujillo and anti-Franco forces. To this I must add Albizu's himself, who once and again, in public but also in private, intimate conversations always defended Harvard against the charge of having mistreated him.

(Since the above lines were written, Albizu Campos has died. His obituaries in the imperialist press have referred to his alleged personal "hatred" for the United States as the motivation for devoting his whole adult life to the cause of his country's liberation. Only a hopelessly provincial and narrow-minded parochialism could come up with such an evaluation of a great revolutionist. But the metropolitan dailies of New York City did not really make an evaluation; they only mouthed a slander.

Not content with their persecution of Albizu Campos living, they continued to attack Albizu Campos dead. The New York Times even exhumed the old story that Albizu was ashamed of his racial origin--his mother was black--and that the U.S. treatment of him as a Black Man made him so angry he then became a nationalist.

Without giving these slanders the dignity of a detailed reply, it is still necessary in the interest of preserving a great revolutionist's memory, to condemn the slanderers.--ed.)

GENERAL WINSHIP

In January 1934, President Roosevelt appointed General Blanton Winship of Macon, Georgia, to the Governorship of Puerto Rico. Winship was not, as it had been many times said, newly acquainted with Puerto Rican realities. Indeed, he was not unfamiliar with Nationalist activities either

Late in 1930, the Nationalist Party launched on the Wall Street market a sale of bonds to raise money to establish the Republic of Puerto Rico. They had five denominations, the largest being \$100. The first public sale was one of \$200,000, announced in April, 1931, in San Juan. The hope was that if the first sale met with success the issue would grow to \$5 million. The first sale of the bonds on the

continent was attempted in the summer of 1932. Governor Colonel Roosevelt, consulted by Washington, advised the War Department to ignore the question. A year later, when the issue moved to Wall Street, General Walker asked the Judge Advocate of the U.S. Army for legal opinion. *The Judge Advocate was General Blanton Winship.* His advice was for prosecution. However, diplomatic opinion prevailed and no action was taken.

It was in January that General Winship was appointed--in the midst of a very militant period on the Island. Strike was the key word during all of 1933. At the turn of the year, following police suggestions, a group of propertied stools for imperialism began making plans for the organization of a so-called "Citizens Committee of One Thousand For the Preservation of Peace and Order."

This alarmist group cabled President Roosevelt that "a state of actual anarchy exists. Towns in state of siege. Police impotent. Business paralyzed." Jorge Bird Arias, general manager and vice president of the Fajardo Sugar Company (the Armstrong, New York, capitalists) and one of the most esteemed Puerto Rican traitors in Washington, wired secretary of War, Stern, that "existing conditions, both economic and political, demand . . . an exceptionally good, strong and capable man."

In this opinion the War Department concurred. It was Colonel James Beverley, a Texan sugar corporation lawyer and former governor of Puerto Rico, who mentioned General Winship. In a letter to his friend General Cox, Beverley wrote January 1, 1934:

"I strongly favor an ex-army officer for the next governor . . . appointed at once, one who has sufficient experience to know how to size up and handle delicate situations and who has the courage to do his duty whether it is popular or not. Is not General Winship available for a position of this kind?"

This letter had just reached Washington when the great strike in Fajardo began. The traditional A.F.L. leadership was rejected by the workers. They called Albizu Campos to lead them. On the 12th day of January, General Winship was appointed.

This General Blanton Winship was the "strong" man requested by Fajardo sugar stooge Bird Arias; the man "who has the courage to do his duty whether it is popular or not", requested by Texan-colonel-sugar-lawyer Beverley. This was the man who was to order the Ponce Massacre.

His kind was sprouting all over the world at the time. That year

of 1934 was the year Hitler rose to power. In 1935, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. In 1936, the Spanish general rebelled against the Republic. Batista was in Cuba. Trujillo next door . . .

THE ROAD TO PONCE

The sugar industry workers' strike of January, 1934, is the starting point whose continuation, politically speaking, is the line that takes us directly to the Ponce Massacre. This great strike marks the point at which Puerto Rico, for the first time in history, represented by the Nationalist Party and with Albizu Campos in the leadership, contended man to man with imperialism to wrest the direct control of the masses out of foreign hands.

The immediate consequence was an imperialist retreat.

This maneuver paralyzed the Puerto Rican offensive, leaving a vacuum the Nationalist Party could not immediately fill. The law of polarity resolved itself into a strengthening of imperialism by its adopting a defensive position. It was at this crucial moment that the petty-bourgeois weakness of the Independentista movement was revealed and the whole situation cried out for a Marxist ally, embodied in a staff of cadres able to transform the immense sympathy and popularity won by Albizu Campos into a solid labor revolutionary organization. But that ally did not exist.

Counting on the impossibility of the Nationalists organizing their natural reserves, imperialism gave in to the demands of the workers. The effect was a general and immediate demobilization of the aroused masses. The Nationalists were deprived, at the same time, of maintaining contact with the working masses and of achieving, even by the torturous trial-and-error method, an elementary labor organization.

The bloody and amazing revolutionary development which followed became, of necessity, a competitive struggle between Albizu's brilliant mind and his courageous followers on one side, and American total power on the other. The Nationalist recovery, of which the Cadets' concentration in Lares, September 23, 1935, and the United Front days of 1936 are examples; the popular emotion in behalf of the Nationalists be a use of the police assassination of five of their leaders in Rio Piedras, on October 24, 1935; the Utuado street fighting for the flag in January, 1936; the counter-attack in February with the revolutionary execution of Colonel Riggs; the people's indignation at the assassination of Beauchamp and Rosade at Police Headquarters on February 23, 1936; demonstrations against the Federal raids and subpoena citations and the sympathy with the incarcerated Nationalist

General Secretary on April 2, 1936; the great de Diego birthday celebration on April 16, 1936; the patriotic rejoicing on the Tydings Bill that same month; the emotional solidarity which accompanied Albizu Campos and his comrades to prison . . . , all of these were episodes, glorious episodes, of Puerto Rican history. But the reaction prevailed. The imperialists punished the Nationalist leadership in court July the 30th, 1936. And in Ponce, the 21st of March, 1937, the people were given punishment through government-sponsored terror.

THE PONCE MASSACRE

1937 - march 21, 1937
On or about March 14th, Plinio Graciany and Luis Castro Quesada, Nationalist leaders of Ponce, notified the township government that the Nationalist Junta (Committee) would hold a meeting, preceded by a parade, on Sunday, March 21st. Even in those stormy days of 1937, Nationalist parades and meetings were a great popular attraction; even the police respected them because of their discipline and order. The mayor of Ponce, Jose Tormos Diego, promptly gave permission. It should be noted that the request for permission was a courtesy the Nationalists extended to the municipal government. According to Puerto Rican law, permission was not needed for the use of plazas and parks for meetings or parades. This colonial Supreme Court ruling of 1926 was also valid for the streets.

On Friday, March 19th, the Insular Chief of Police, Colonel Orbeta arrived in Ponce to study the situation. (Orbeta was the brother-in-law of Dionisio Trigo, Franco's representative in Puerto Rico. When Trigo died in a Berlin hospital, he was sent to Madrid with a Luftwaffe escort.) Orbeta went back to San Juan and talked with General Winship. There, at that moment, the Massacre was planned and ordered.

Winship ordered Orbeta to go back to Ponce and convince (or coerce) the Mayor to stop the parade.

On March 20th, *the day before the parade was to be held*, the district police chief of Ponce, Captain Felipe Blanco, wrote the following letter to Nationalist leaders Luis Castro Quesada and Plinio Graciany:

"I have the pleasure of acknowledging your letter, dated yesterday, at 7:40 P.M., informing me of the parade of the Cadetes de la Republica and the meeting to be held by the Junta Nacionalista next Sunday, March 21st, in this city of Ponce, the program of which I have read on Page 3 of El Mundo yesterday, which says in part:

" 2:00 P.M. -- Divisional Concentration of the Liberation Army,

District of Ponce and neighboring towns, to parade along the streets of Ponce!

"I wish to inform you that, according to instructions from my superiors, the Police will not permit this celebration, and by this letter, in fulfilment of my duty, I so notify you."

On March 21st, and for some days before, a significant concentration of police was taking place in Ponce. They were well armed: rifles, carbines, Thompson sub-machine guns, tear gas bombs, hand grenades, plus the usual police clubs, etc., a force of 200 men in addition to the routine Ponce police garrison.

Colonel Orbeta talked things over with Captain Blanco. They decided to see Mayor Tormos and convince him to cancel the permit. It was not until after midday that they located the Mayor, who made it very clear that he had granted the permit.

Colonel Orbeta tried to impress the Mayor with the dangers involved. He said that he had information that the Nationalists planned to come armed and that he had particular information concerning armed groups coming from Mayaguez. Nevertheless, under later cross-examination by the Investigation Committee, the Colonel said that he had told the Mayor that such a parade was scandalous, that he had no information, but any one of the Nationalists might act as an insane man and throw stones at the shop windows or commit any number of disorderly acts. As a matter of fact it was proved beyond doubt that the group of 50 persons from Mayaguez (composed of women and children, as well as men) was unarmed, as were all the other Nationalists.

After long discussions the Mayor gave in. He immediately called the Nationalist's leaders and told them he had overlooked the fact that it was a religious holiday, Palm Sunday, and that the Paulist Fathers had asked him not to allow the parade.

The Nationalists knew he was lying, but ignoring this, they told him that the people coming to the parade were already in Ponce, that the parade would be held in orderly silence, and that they would inform the Paulist Fathers to that effect. At this point the Mayor cut the interview short and said that the permit was canceled.

Present at the last interview, in addition to the formerly mentioned Ponce leaders, were the Acting President of the Nationalist Party, lawyer Julio Pinto Gandia, and the Acting Secretary General, lawyer Lorenzo Pineiro.

From this moment until 3:00 P.M. a series of discussions took place

between Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco on one side and the Nationalists leaders on the other. While these discussions were taking place the police concentrated heavily on all streets around the Nationalists Club and at the corner of Marina and Aurora Streets. The Nationalists were entering the club with their wives and children. There is plenty of evidence that those who were not Nationalists were told by the police not to go into the area between Marina, Aurora and Jobos Streets.

But Nationalists (easily recognizable because many were in uniform and those in civilian clothes were wearing insignias) were allowed to go across the police lines. About 80 uniformed Cadets were permitted among them.

Shortly before the shooting, Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco visited the area. The very air was tense. The police were already there and the Nationalists were surrounded. Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco then left. They said afterwards that they had given no orders to the police. According to Colonel Orbeta's story, they went around Ponce and its surroundings in a police car, looking at the beautiful scenery.

They returned after the shooting was over.

MUSIC AND FIRE

At about 3:15 the Cadets lined up for the march in a column of three abreast. Behind them was the Nurses' Corps in white uniforms. Trailing the Nurses was the band, which consisted of only four musicians. The band played the National Anthem, 'La Borinquena' and Cadets and Nurses stood at attention.

The reader can now study the small map which shows the relation between the police, the cadets, the nurses and the public. Marina Street runs from north to south. It is first crossed by Luna Street here. A little farther up, it is crossed by Aurora Street. On this corner the Nationalists had their club. Then comes Jobos Street. Between Luna and Aurora, a group of police were lined up on the east side of Marina. Just off Marina a large group of police was standing ready in the middle of Aurora Street. Other groups formed on both sides of Aurora. On the west side of Marina, another group of Police stood in front of the Nationalist Club. All were armed with rifles, tear gas bombs, carbines, etc. The Cadets were standing at attention on the south side of Aurora.

Behind the Nationalist formation, there was another group of policemen armed with Thompson sub-machine guns. Eye-witnesses and photographs show how completely trapped and cornered the Nationalists were--and how weaponless. Two news photographers had taken positions on the balcony of the home of a prominent Ponce family, the Amy family. (George Amy, an outstanding Puerto Rican artist, had worked for the old New York Globe for many years.) These photographers took many pictures. One, taken by Jose Luis Conde, seconds before the shooting, shows the police coming in toward the people from the north, that is, from Aurora Street. It also shows large groups of people, men, women and children--nearly all of them gathered at the corner of Aurora and Marina, almost in front of the Nationalist Club. The photo also shows the Cadets in formation, followed by the nurses, and right behind them the police detachment with machine-guns under the command of Chief Perez Segarra.

Just remember that Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco, who had apparently expected ferocious acts from the Cadets, had left for a sight-seeing drive around town. Captain Blanco later declared that nobody was left in command of the police and that the auxiliary chiefs, Soldevila, Bernal and Perez Segarra, each one commanding a separate group of policemen, had not received any instructions.

The Cadets were completely surrounded with no chance of escape. It is obvious from the police formation that it had but one purpose. And that purpose was not simply to break up the Cadets' parade or dissolve a riot. The classical dispersion and anti-riot tactic is to give those being attacked a chance to disperse. This chance was deliberately denied to the Puerto Rican Nationalists on that fateful Palm Sunday afternoon of March 21st, 1937.

The purpose was to frighten the whole Puerto Rican people with a show of crude brutality, a massacre.

THE FIRST SHOT

In a situation like this, anyone might shoot first. And each side would naturally claim to have been the victim of the first shot. But in his report to the American Civil Liberties Union, Mr. Arthur Garfield Hayes, who investigated the Ponce Massacre, writes:

"Carlos Torres Morales, a photographer for *El Imparcial*, being aware of the menacing attitude of the police, raised his camera to his eyes. Before he had focused, a shot was fired, perhaps two, he was not sure. He took the picture.

"In his photo we can see practically all the policemen at Aurora

and Marina Streets (maybe 17 or 18) ready to fire against the people. All of them have weapons in their hands. We also see a policeman at the moment he fires his revolver. Although we have used the testimony of experts, it was really unnecessary, as the firing policeman appears with the upper part of his arm toward the flying crowd. His forearm is hidden by another person, but in accord with the direction of his arm and beyond the other person there is a white cloud and the smoke of the shot. The shot is being fired directly at the people on the sidewalk. The firing policeman can be clearly seen.

"This Committee has not been able to understand why this policeman and other officers fired at the crowd and not the Cadets, unless they wanted to clear out the front side of the Nationalist Club on whose sidewalk and surroundings they were standing. Or perhaps the purpose was to terrorize them.

"We are not saying that this photo shows the first shot. In fact, the testimony of another witness directly identified another policeman as having fired the first shot.

"We have tried to understand why the government did not use these photographs, all of them widely published. They show the police in action. They show the Nationalist Cadets --the Army of Liberation--50 to 70 in number, standing in silence and motionless, their hands hanging at their sides. At their front stands their commander in white uniform. Beside them there is a boy, black-shirted, his arm around a comrade's shoulder. Behind them is the Cadets' flag-bearer. All of them look somewhat surprised, patiently waiting for the disaster to strike. No one looks ready to run, not ready to even make a movement. Behind them are the girls, in white, some of them running away. One of them has almost reached the sidewalk. This in itself corroborates the photographer's statement that he took the photo immediately after the shooting began. Behind the band is a police platoon, some 15 men, armed with machine-guns and rifles. Nationalists and non-Nationalists were murdered."

THE BLOOD AND THE SPIRIT

At the first shot the police went crazy. Volleys from all sides fell on the Cadets and the people. For about ten minutes they were submitted to cross-fire. When the last volley had done its work, twenty lay dead. More than 150 were wounded. Another boy died in a nearby hospital; some were maimed for life.

That half hour before the shooting and those murderous ten minutes of the killings have gone down in history as an unsurpassed example of serenity and courage of people under fire.

Bolivar Marguez, a cadet, fell mortally wounded, dragged himself towards the sidewalk and on the wall of a house wrote with his blood, "Long Live the Republic! Down with the assassins!"

Carmen Fernandez, 35 years old, saw the flag-bearer killed. As she tried to take the flag from him she received a volley of carbine fire. She fell, seriously wounded.

Dominga Cruz Becerril, a girl from Mayaguez, had already reached cover when she saw the flag on the pavement. She left her protected cover, ran to the flag, raised and waved it, and ran with it to the Pila Hospital. She was not wounded. Asked why she had done this she answered quietly: "Our Master has said the flag should always be flying." (The Master was Pedro Albizu Campos, the Nationalist leader.)

Genaro Lugo did not stay in the place after he saw the girl's murder. As he ran, he saw the police under Chief Perez Segarra's sub-machine squad firing on the terrified public.

Julio Conesa was the owner of the then only radio station in Ponce. He had parked his car at the Marina and Jobos street corner. He saw the police sub-machine detachment shooting against the people. He did not know the Rodriguez family at the time, but he recognized them in the photos. He had no doubts that he saw the police sub-machinegunning the father and two sons of this family.

The Rodriguez's were standing in front of a shoemaker's shop south of Jobos Street. Rafael, 18 years old, had just taken a couple of shots with his little camera. As he was preparing for another, the firing began. They fell on their faces for protection. There was a general discharge. He heard his brother say, "ay...!" and he saw his father immediately raising himself to protect his son. He saw his head was bleeding. He was fatally wounded. He died in a matter of seconds. His brother also. Rafael himself was wounded. Two policemen picked him up a quarter of an hour later. They threw him like a bag into a police wagon.

A young man was walking down Jobos Street. Suddenly he saw a policeman coming towards him. He was at least 50 feet away from the center of the shooting. As he read murder in the policeman's face and saw a gun in his hand, he cried out:-- "I am not a Nationalist, I am a National Guard. I am..." --until death silenced him forever.

He was really a National Guard. He had drilled that same morning at the El Castillo esplanade, some 100 meters from the place where he was killed. His name was Jose Delgado and he was 20 years old.

Such a socialite as Don Luis Sanchez Frasqueri (he is the father of Roberto Sanchez Vilella, who last November was named, through the polls, to the governorship) saw a man was going to be killed and yelled, "Don't kill him!" A police lieutenant, recognizing who he was, and not willing to have such a respectable witness against himself, stopped his men. The man was pushed unharmed into the police patrol. When Sr. Sanchez Frasqueri saw him again he was wrapped in bandages. He told him that in the police wagon first and at headquarters afterwards, he had been brutally beaten.

A fruit vendor, by the side of his car (Sanchez Frasqueri's car), was 75 yards away from the Nationalist Club. A policeman passing by saw him, turned back and opened his head with his riot club. This was also part of Sanchez Frasqueri's statement. At the same distance from the Club, on Luna Street, Sr. Sanchez Frasqueri saw a corpse. The body was filled with holes. In the man's agony he had tried to write with his blood the word valor, but he only lived to write V A L...

"When we began our investigation - wrote the Investigating Committee headed by Arthur Garfield Hays - we objected to naming our Committee The Committee For the Investigation of the Ponce Massacre. To refer to the Ponce tragedy, we used the Ponce Case, the riot, or any other phrase that should demonstrate our intention of dealing objectively with the facts. Now that we have heard all the proofs we agree that the people of Ponce had given this tragedy the only title it can possibly have: The Ponce Massacre."

APPEASEMENT

That night the Berlin radio had something to say. Nazi virulence was fed with flesh of martyrs. The trumpets resounded at all ends of the Axis. Mussolini's loudspeakers were taking revenge for all of America's hypocrisy on Ethiopia. Tokyo was giving the Asian peoples the truth about Franklin D. Roosevelt's humanitarianism. But, above all else, they were telling Latin America about the tenderness in the Good Neighbor's heart.

On March 27, 1937, the New York Post demanded:

"We expect Congress to make an independent investigation of the increasing unrest in Puerto Rico. The suppression of the Nationalist Party seems to become bloodier, and it is thought that it

will eliminate the softening effect of the Good Neighbor Policy and of its last obstacles, just removed, with Ambassador Caffery out of Havana... If Puerto Rico wants independence our answer should be to grant it. To answer her demand with machine guns is dishonorable for a people who love the memory of its own seditious nationalists of 1776."

Congressman Vito Marcantonio, sincerely on our side, wanted such an investigation. Senator Borah indicated some interest. Nothing came from Congress. In Puerto Rico itself, the American residents, some 1500, with the exception of half a dozen, were solidly behind Winship and joyful for the massacre. It is good to keep this in mind, because there are 65,000 U. S. residents in Puerto Rico today, who are here only as exploiters and agents of exploiters. In a similar event, one can venture to say that the half dozen of 1937 would not be much bigger now. A portent of this was given ten years ago when Americans at the Teatro Tapia fanatically *cheered the police* during the presentation of Rene Marques' PALM SUNDAY, a drama on the Ponce Massacre.

But the American Civil Liberties Union, of which Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes was an officer, did make a thorough investigation, on request of its Puerto Rican representative Don Miguel Mondragon. It was presided over by Mr. Arthur Garfield Hays, whom we have quoted.

Because of Puerto Rico's plight, the deprivation of outside justice, and the high tension of the moment, the ACLU report has been generally taken as sympathetic. But it is not. There is some justice in it, but no sympathy. We know the ACLU officials have no sympathy for us, not a single bit of interest in what really counts, that is Puerto Rico's independence, which is the first and greatest of all civil rights for Puerto Rico, and the source of all others. We know that Roger Baldwin, the Committee's chairman, had wanted the Nationalist leadership indicted for murder and incitement to commit murder, so that imperialism could be whitewashed of all accusation of political persecution.

But there is justice in it because Hays saw the truth. He was shown the truth by his associates in the investigating committee. Because, yes, there is always something that is overlooked when quoting the Report: the ACLU Report is the consequence of an investigation carried on, not only by Dr. Hays, but by other members of the Committee as well -- Antonio Ayuso Valdivieso, Emilio S. Belaval, Fulgencio Pinero, Francisco M. Zeno, Jose Davila Ricci

and Mariano Acosta Velarde. Behind this group of distinguished Puerto Ricans was the whole people of Puerto Rico, to the very District Attorney of Ponce, R. V. Perez Marchand, who resigned his post rather than carry out Winship's wish to indict for murder the innocent survivors of the Massacre.

The assassin general was left alone in his palace, with his pretorian guard, his little bunch of killers and sycophants, his resident countrymen. Washington was the center of world accusations.

So appeasement became the order of the day. And appeasement came to Puerto Rico. The ACLU Report places the blame for the Massacre squarely on the shoulders of General Winship. That did not embarrass Washington. Had the President of the United States wanted to remove his assassin-appointee he had only to do so, as he did two years afterward for other reasons. But Franklin Roosevelt did not want to do this at the time. Unmoved by the ACLU Report, he was equally unmoved by the coinciding McCaleb Report, the result of a secret investigation made by the Department of the Interior. General Winship, backed by Gruening, had found secure protection in the White House.

To do justice to Hays, it must be said that he grasped the inner meaning of the situation which the Nationalists faced in Ponce. On May 23, 1937, he wrote to a Miss Mason:

"Now I will tell you something about Ponce, which I did not even suggest for our report since perhaps it is my individual view. If I were a Nationalist and had been notified a few days in advance that a parade was prohibited, I would have called it off. Nobody but a people with a martyr complex of a lunatic would lead a crowd to face machine guns. But if I had arranged a parade and there was an attempt to stop it at the last minute, my self-respect would make me see it through. It may be just as crazy, but that is the way we human beings are. When the issue is drawn, we refuse to be intimidated. If I had been the leader, I too would have said, 'Forward march!' At least I hope I would."

But appeasement succeeded. Because Mr. Hays was an American, because the ACLU is an American institution, because Secretary Ickes was one of its officials, and because of the Tydings Independence Bill, the Report was generally interpreted as a signal of approval by the Administration.

Because the liberal-reformist tendency was dominant in the Independentista intelligentsia, because there was no Marxist-guided workers' organization to back the unconvinced Nationalists, because it appeared to offer a way out of the nightmare of police terrorism, the ACLU Report was paramount in restoring faith in an American solution of Puerto Rico's independence.

Late in May, the 10-year sentence pending an appeal in Washington, by Albizu Campos and seven other top party leaders, came down from the Supreme Court as approved. On June 7, 1937, the bars of Atlanta Penitentiary closed behind them.

THE UNSEEN REALITY

Apparently, all was darkness. In political life, what is real is often not visible. The doors of history were opening wider for what was, and has been, the core of Albizu Campos' life: the independence of Puerto Rico. He himself still had new chapters to add to Puerto Rico's national struggle. And in the very years ahead, going through the abyss and the heights of this century, whose historic task our Hostos * predicted as the liquidation of colonialism, socialism broadens its domains, and its torch goes on bringing light among the working masses and nations, which only socialism can make really free. Its flag waves triumphantly in Puerto Rico's most beloved sister nation, Cuba.

Of those 21 killed and 150 wounded that Palm Sunday afternoon in Ponce, not one was a propertied person. It was to their own class they really offered their lives and sufferings..

But the illegal foreign government power which indicted their leaders in a foreign court, in a foreign language; the President of the United States in whose name as head of a foreign government they were indicted; the foreign judge, the foreign marshall, the foreign prosecuting attorneys, the jurors, mainly foreign or representatives of foreign corporations, the foreign prison into which they were sent, the assassin-general, the weapons, all this, yes, all of them belong, in their own right to the exploiter class. And it is their class that is doomed by history's justice.

* Eugenio M. de Hostos - Puerto Rican philosopher, 1839-1903. Died in exile. Predicted among other things, the emergence of China as a great power, bringing with its revival a new creative spirit for modern times.

That time will come, and soon. As for today, the recent bombings of North Vietnam prove, the whole world is aware that U.S. imperialism is the main enemy of all the people of the world.

When for Puerto Ricans, the hour of decision comes we will not be alone in the world. And here in Puerto Rico a workers' organization will be the revolutionary standardbearer of independence. The Puerto Rican Socialist League struggles to achieve this end.

*Guaynabo, Puerto Rico
February 24, 1965*

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