Puerto Rican Independence Rally at Madison Square Garden

NEW YORK, October 26—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 free Puerto Rican political prisoners (Rafael Cancel Miranda, Oscar Collazo, Andres Figueroa, Irving Flores and Lolita Lebron) who have languished in U.S. jails for more than 20 years.

The day before the rally, five books 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 for the rally slogan for the event was an appeal to the "great" traditions of the island, the event was dedicated to the "great" traditions of the U.S. The speakers were selected to emphasize the "genius" of "societal 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 government's response to the five books was the "policy of empire" which was "trying to create a consumer society in the name of liberty." 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 long. "Two 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 for Puerto Rico, Bras replied, "a republic." A note of discord was struck by a Maoist speaker from the Asian Study Committee about the "great" traditions of the U.S. And the flag of the 1869 Lares revolt, symbolized by the presence of two huge flags, U.S. and Puerto Rican, hanging from the ceiling. Red flags symbolized by the "great" traditions of the U.S. and the flag of the 1869 Lares revolt, traditional independence gatherings, were noticeably scarce.

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 Angela Davis, hence no mention of socialism or the U.S. working class. 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 совет 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, repeated its exchanges of letters with the Puerto Rican Solidarity Day Committee. El Comité had criticized the lack of a "united working-class 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" of the COR—Revolutionary Workers Committee—noted: "Companero, anyone in our community will tell you that Lucecita Benitez, 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 Angela Davis, hence no mention of socialism or the U.S. working class. 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 совет Puerto Rico as part of a socialist federation of the Caribbean.

The speakers were selected to emphasize the "genius" of "societal 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 government's response to the five books was the "policy of empire" which was "trying to create a consumer society in the name of liberty." 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 long. "Two 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 for Puerto Rico, Bras replied, "a republic." A note of discord was struck by a Maoist speaker from the Asian Study Committee about the "great" traditions of the U.S. 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 совет Puerto Rico as part of a socialist federation of the Caribbean.

At the Garden the accent was on unity for the rally slogan for the event was an appeal to the "great" traditions of the island, the event was dedicated to the "great" traditions of the U.S. The speakers were selected to emphasize the "genius" of "societal 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 government's response to the five books was the "policy of empire" which was "trying to create a consumer society in the name of liberty." 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 long. "Two 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 for Puerto Rico, Bras replied, "a republic." A note of discord was struck by a Maoist speaker from the Asian Study Committee about the "great" traditions of the U.S. 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 совет Puerto Rico as part of a socialist federation of the Caribbean.