

OBREROS EN MARCHA

POLITICAL ORGAN OF EL MOVIMIENTO DE IZQUIERDA NACIONAL PUERTORRIQUEÑO—EL COMITE

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NEW YORK CITY:

HEALTH CARE TO POOR THREATENED



Members of the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) picket in front of NYC's Metropolitan Hospital in January.

EDITORIAL

On the *New York Post's* Attacks on Puerto Ricans

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INTERNATIONAL

OBREROS EN MARCHA

Obreros En Marcha is the central publication of El Comité-M.I.N.P. (Puerto Rican National Left Movement). El Comité-M.I.N.P. is a developing Marxist-Leninist organization which originated on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, New York. We formed in the summer of 1970 as a Latin community organization committed to the struggle to improve the living conditions of the poor, mainly minority, families who lived in that area. Our goal was to get decent, low-rent housing, quality education and improved health services for these families.

Two years after our formation we began to respond to the needs of Latin workers in the factories. We also started to organize students at the university level and to get more actively involved in the struggle for Puerto Rico's independence. Our participation in these struggles ultimately led to our transformation into a new type of organization with more defined political objective. Thus in 1974 we began a slow and complex process of transition into a Marxist-Leninist organization: an organization guided by the science of Marxism-Leninism and integrated into the struggles of working people.

As such an organization, we understand that an essential aspect of our work is to raise the level of political consciousness of workers in this country. This is one of the conditions necessary to develop the revolutionary movement capable of overthrowing the present order and building on its ruins a new socialist society. In this effort, we join with other revolutionary forces in the U.S.

Our political organ, *Obreros En Marcha*, has as its goal the development of revolutionary consciousness among our ranks, the advanced elements of the people, and among the masses in general. We attempt to accomplish this task by the examination and analysis of the developing progressive and revolutionary movements locally, nationally and internationally.

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EDITORIAL

NEW YORK POST ATTACKS PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY

In its December 27 editorial entitled "Major Operation," the *New York Post* unleashed a slanderous and racist attack on Latin people in New York City, reserving its most vicious remarks for the Puerto Rican community. In the opinion of the editors of the *New York Post*, one of the answers to New York City's fiscal crisis is to cut \$150 million dollars from the Health and Hospitals Corporation budget by shutting down half of the municipal hospitals and drastically reducing staff and services in those that remain open. The editorial states that the city government is "burdened" by having to provide health care and services to people who can't pay for treatment, i.e. "thousands of welfare recipients and transient illegal aliens. . ." In singling out the Puerto Rican population as evidence to support its malicious and twisted argument, the article states that "the city's hospitals should not be an extension of the welfare system, paying substantially above the welfare rate for thousands of Puerto Ricans who have made this their special preserve."

This type of racist and national chauvinist manipulation of working and poor people is neither unique nor unusual; rather, it is a basic feature of this racist society, particularly in times of economic crisis such as the present. The media, along with educational and other social institutions, has always been a major vehicle through which the oppression of various groups in society is expressed. The poor, particularly Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, undocumented workers, etc., are continuously blamed for the economic problems of the nation. The racist call words tagged on to Puerto Ricans in the *Post* article have a familiar ring which, historically directed predominantly against the Black community, have in recent years been extended to immigrant groups, particularly among the oppressed nationalities. The objective of these lies today, as in the past, is to divide the working class and poor: to manipulate the sentiment of the white majority against minority groups, to pit one group against the other, and to divide the various nationalities and ethnic groups so that they remain in a weakened position in face of severe cutbacks, rising inflation and growing unemployment which affect us all as a class.

The Puerto Rican national minority has not been silent in the face of this recent attack. Various progressive forces, community organizations, religious groups, politicians, and labor unions have united to respond to the *Post* editorial, placing enough pressure on the editors to obtain a formal retraction and apology from them. The unity achieved among such broad sectors—which included support from outside the Puerto Rican national minority as well—has been very positive but risks being plagued by a recurrent weakness. Because the reactions to blatant attacks such as this one are often "incident-oriented", there is a danger that once the specific issue dies so will the unity. This spontaneous and defensive approach leads to short-lived unity. This was the case, for example, with the struggle to overturn the Bakke decision. Once the Supreme Court made its decision against affirmative action, the nation-wide movement lost all momentum.

In the coming period, we will be increasingly challenged to overcome the limitations of short-range work. Economic indications—predicted by bourgeois and radical economists alike—are that the U.S. economy is headed for a steadily downward turn, as severe as or even worse than the one which hit the U.S. in 1973-1975. Such conditions will further lower the standard of living of the working class and, in particular, the oppressed nationalities. Along with worsening living conditions will come an increased wave of repressive, racist and national chauvinist attacks on workers. It is racism and national chauvinism which makes the oppressed nationalities the sector to bear the brunt of these attacks. Furthermore, these increased attacks will not just focus on economic issues but will raise social and cultural questions, promoting an ideology advocating the inferior character of national minority people. The *Post* editorial is an explicit manifestation of this.

In light of the deteriorating situation already existing in New York City, we know that the racist attacks will continue. We must begin to create the organizational mechanisms which bring together all the forces—labor organizations, community groups, individuals, etc.—to challenge attacks on the oppressed nationalities and on the working class in general. For MINP-El Comité, our responsibility is to address the particular manifestations as they affect the Puerto Rican national minority.

We join in denouncing the *New York Post* and call all progressive forces to continue to fight these and all attempts to divide the working class. ●

LOCAL

City Hospitals Targeted for Cuts HEALTHCARE TO POOR THREATENED

The latest attack to New York City's working and poor people came December 20, 1978 when health officials announced that the municipal hospital budget of \$1.2 billion would be cut by 10%. This drastic cut will signify the closing of several municipal hospitals and the layoff of thousands of hospital workers. According to Dr. Martin Cherkasky, the mayor's top health advisor and president of Montifiore Hospital Medical Center, the number of municipal hospitals must be cut in half by 1982 if the city is to survive the current fiscal crisis. This "analysis" feeds the social myth that services to the working class and poor are the main cause of the crisis.

In order to close the ever-ominous \$2.3 billion "budget deficit" over the next three years, Mayor Koch has outlined a merciless program of cuts to the city's social services and municipal labor force. He has targeted the municipal hospital system in particular. His announced \$5.8 million cut to an already limping Health and Hospitals Corporation threatens the lifeline of one of the most vital services to our city's poor.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HOSPITAL SYSTEM IN N.Y.C.

In New York City, in-patient health care is provided by three distinct types of institutions—proprietary or profit making hospitals (8% of all beds), voluntary or "non-profit making" hospitals (70% of all beds), and lastly, municipal or public hospitals (22% of all beds). We see that the majority of hospital beds are in the voluntary, not the municipal, hospitals. Yet Koch and his health bureaucrats continue to scream that "there are too many hospital beds in N.Y.C.!", and that therefore the municipal hospitals must be reduced. Why doesn't Koch attempt to reduce the beds in the voluntary hospitals where there is the largest percentage of beds? The answer will become clear as we see that a service to people which the state has a responsibility to provide for, is also guided by the underlying aim of this society—profit.

In 1961, an agreement was reached between N.Y.C. and the private teaching hospitals and medical schools. These institutions would stock the hospitals with doctors and utilize these facilities and their patients—the workers and poor of the city—for research and training. Not only did the city pay \$150 million to these institutions for "service", but it contributed to

the dehumanizing character which health care takes on in capitalist society.

After this transformation in the municipal hospitals, conditions began to worsen. The late 60's saw numerous investigations of hospital conditions—criminal neglect, dangerous building conditions, serious personnel shortages, etc. These conditions clearly pointed out that there were two classes of health care in New York City—one for those who could pay and another for the poor and working class.

THE LAYOFFS BEGIN

In June of 1970, in response to mounting community pressure, the city created the Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) to take over the administration of the 18 municipal hospitals. However, nothing changed and with the 1974-76 round of budget cuts conditions got even worse. Inferior and broken-down X-ray and operating room equipment caused delays in operations. At times there were no machines available for necessary tests. Scarce sanitary and medical supplies were the order of the day. But the cuts in hospital workers created real crisis situations.

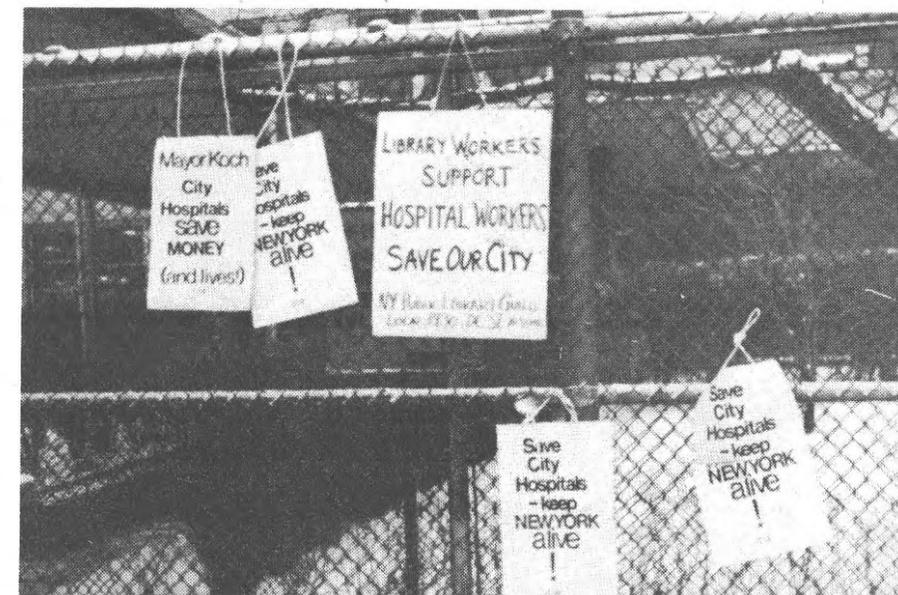
Housekeeping (maintenance) and nurses aides were hardest hit. These are two of the

categories of workers that are almost exclusively black and Latin. This added to the increasing unemployment among the city's oppressed nationalities. These layoffs directly affected the quality of patient care. The workload on the remaining workers put an unrealistic demand on the nurses aides and the increasing work of the maintenance staff resulted in poor sanitary conditions and a corresponding higher rate of infections, leading to complications and even death.

But the problem is not presented as a shortage of workers. The biggest hype is the "problem" of the "excessive" hospital beds. The gist of this whole question is that beds equal profits for the voluntary hospitals. They must function at a 90% occupancy rate to realize a profit. The patients whom they are vying for are those on Medicaid and Medicare, since they receive a higher reimbursement rate than the municipal hospitals. The "excess" of beds actually means there are not enough patients in the voluntary hospitals.

RESPONSES TO THE PROPOSED CUTS

Responses to Koch's proposed cutbacks have come from a wide spectrum of groups. Consumer groups and public interest organizations have accused the city administration of trying to fill the empty beds in the private hospitals at the expense of the working poor and particularly minorities. The Coalition to Save Public Hospitals and the City-wide Council of Municipal Hospital Community Advisory Boards have said that they will not allow the mayor to continue favoring the private institutions at the expense of the municipal hospitals. These groups, together with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) are investigating



Signs of striking doctors at Metropolitan

legal measures that can be taken.

Meanwhile, union leaders have been quick to protest the cuts, but have done little else. Victor Gotbaum, Executive Director of District Council 37, of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which represents 23,000 municipal hospital workers, has said that "we have no intention of cooperating with the mayor in the destruction of New York City."

Yet days later, his Municipal Labor Committee submitted a plan to Koch that would permit the cuts to be made entirely through attrition. According to Gotbaum "there is no need for layoffs as attrition and transfer of skills can do it". Rank and file members recognize that attrition means a significant worsening of working conditions and of the quality of health care available to patients.

The past history of D.C. 37 has shown that its leaders' initial response to attacks on city workers sounds militant, but is merely a prelude to sellout negotiations. These misleaders will only maintain their militant stance if the rank and file is able to organize independently and combatively.

COMMITTEE OF INTERNS AND RESIDENTS

The most militant and organized response to the cuts has come from the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) which represents over 2,000 doctors in municipal hospitals. In late December they announced that they would walk off their jobs at 17 city hospitals to protest layoffs and hospital closings. They were also demanding adequate staff and equipment to give first class care at all city hospitals, among other demands. The doctors were also responding to their own working conditions which include working weeks of 80-90 hours, lack of supervision by their superiors and little or no proper equipment to do their jobs.

The CIR received the support of D.C. 37 hospital unions who encouraged their membership to support the strike on their lunch hour and prior to their shifts.

Just prior to the 24-hour strike, plans were modified to affect only 9 hospitals: those most directly endangered by the cuts. The HHC immediately got a temporary restraining order in the State Supreme Court to prevent the work stoppage on the



Striking doctors and supporters in front of Harlem Hospital

grounds that it would violate the Taylor Law, which prevents public employees from striking.

Joseph Hoffman, head of the HHC, denounced the strike as a "labor tactic", and threatened the doctors with cancellations of their malpractice insurance and withholding their certification to practice medicine. Despite these threats, and contrary to bourgeois press reports, the strike was effective at Metropolitan, Harlem, Lincoln, and Kings County Hospitals. Nurses and rank and file members from D.C. 37 locals 1549, 420, and 371 joined the doctors on the picket line.

STRATEGY

Our municipal hospital system will survive only if there is an organized, conscious, and sustained effort to defend it. All city hospital workers and patients know the increasingly deteriorating conditions in these institutions. The fight to maintain our city hospitals must be linked to the struggle to upgrade them and make them responsive to the needs of the communities they serve.

Mayor Koch says that he won't be deterred from closing some hospitals by "blunderbuss charges" or "demagogic,

racial epithets", by those who seek to keep the hospitals open. He argues that by these closings, the limited dollars for medical services will be able to upgrade a smaller number of hospitals who refuse to provide care for the 1.4 million medically indigent New Yorkers.

Clearly, the struggle to save the city hospitals is a fundamental one. The alliances that can be built are broad: from rank and file unionists and community groups to doctors. As the struggle intensifies attempts will be made to divide the working class and place the blame for this situation on different groups. We must fight against all such attempts.

The CIR has said that the strike was only the first of many tactics to voice their opposition to the cuts. Their ability to carry out further actions will depend upon the degree to which they can build unity and coordinated work with hospital workers and community residents. Still, because of the experiences that many people in the communities have had with doctors, they are skeptical as to the commitment that the doctors have to continue struggling to maintain the city hospital system.

We must put out efforts to educate the communities as to the serious threat that these particular cuts pose to their very lives. We should propagandize the struggle that is occurring within the hospitals and push for the active participation of the community within this struggle. The success of the struggle will require us to build unity and educate our fellow workers and community activists not in the health field that these cuts are part and parcel of the overall offensive against the working class. Every social and educational service in this city has been drastically affected by cutbacks.

It is our responsibility to do all we can to facilitate the forming of, and play an active role in the unity that will be decisive in the struggle to save our hospitals. ●

COURT SUPPORTS ATTACK ON LOW-INCOME HOUSING

During the late 60's and early 70's, the West Side of Manhattan in New York City was a community in struggle. Poor and working class, primarily Latin, families were fighting to keep their homes in an area that was being transformed by the West Side Urban Renewal Plan into a petit-bourgeois, moderate and upper-income community.

Although the stated purpose of the plan, initiated in 1958, was to create a totally "socially and economically integrated community," to the 12,000 poor families in the area, "urban renewal" meant "urban removal." In 1958, these families constituted 67% of the total population in the 10-block target area. Over the years, 9,500 families were dispersed to the ghettos of the South Bronx and Brooklyn, lulled by the false promises of the city that they could return to their community. Initially, the city didn't even have an official figure of how many apartments would be built for low-income families. After much struggle by progressive forces in the community, the local community board and the city agreed to build 2,500 units of low-income housing. Today the struggle continues to get the city to implement its agreement.

It was this struggle which in 1971 gave birth to the Squatter's Movement. Operation Move-In (OMI), as the group called itself, involved approximately 200 families, who moved into vacated city-owned buildings that were still in sound condition. These families were determined to make their homes in the buildings they took over, unless the city found them quality alternative space in the urban renewal area.

One particular row of buildings on Site 30 (one of the blocks to be torn down) became the focal point of the struggle. Site 30 was designated for complete demolition. But OMI and its supporters refused to move. After a long and bitter struggle, a compromise was reached. The squatters would leave Site 30 and the buildings would be demolished; but the city would build 160 units of low-rent public housing. A victory had been won!

Yet the reactionary forces in the community would not allow this concession to poor, minority tenants. In 1971, Trinity Episcopal School—an elite private school adjacent to Site 30—brought a legal suit against the construction of public housing on the site. They were soon joined in the suit by CONTINUE (Committee of Neighbors to Insure a Normal Urban Environment), the most racist and outspoken enemies of poor and minority people on the West Side. CONTINUE is composed of many of the petit-bourgeois elements who moved to the West Side when the 9,500

poor families were kicked out of the area.

The suit is based on the National Environment Policy Act, implying that more poor people in the area would "pollute" the area. CONTINUE stated that "concentrations" of low-income people "depreciate property values and destroy the fabric of the community." The court agreed to their suit. For the past 8 years, Site 30 has remained an empty lot while community forces struggled to get the court to reverse its racist decision.

On December 21, 1978, the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that, based on the CONTINUE suit, low-income housing could not be built on Site 30.

The court's decision was a setback. The

legal fight goes on, but other tactics must be used as well, such as the unity of all moderate and progressive forces against CONTINUE, and its racist practices in the community. The Site 30 fight is part of the wider struggle to get constructed the 2500 low-income units originally promised by the city. The leading force in this struggle is the United Tenants Association, (UTA), a tenant group representing families still living on the remaining urban renewal sites. The UTA has called for and is working to build a coalition of all community groups, low-income and moderate families to demand that the city meet its commitment of 2500 units and that it construct low-income housing on Site 30. ●



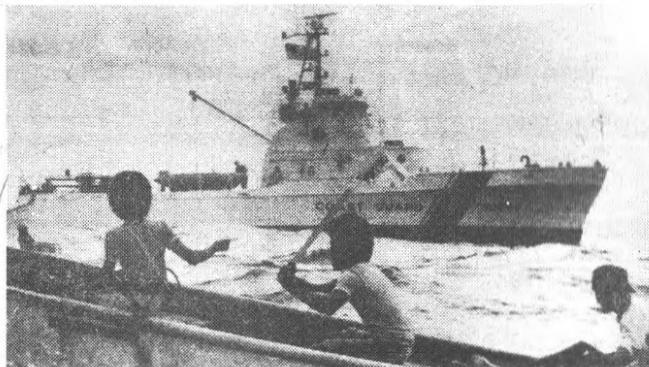
Members of OMI take over building in 1971



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VIEQUES: AN ISLAND IN STRUGGLE



Coast Guard men observing a group of challenging fishermen.

Vieques, otherwise known as Isla Nena, is a small island, 6 miles southeast of Puerto Rico. It is a municipality of Puerto Rico. Vieques is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the north and by the Caribbean Sea on the south. The main source of livelihood for its 8 to 9 thousand residents is fishing.

“Vieques belongs to us, let’s reclaim it”, is the slogan that appears on the flags of the fishing boats that have challenged the presence of the U.S. Navy in Vieques and its bombing practices on that island. The challenge has been hurled through direct confrontation on the ocean, in the courts, “fish-ins” in defiance of injunctions, demonstrations, and rallies—all carried out mostly since February 1978.

The Viequenses have had their fill of gunfire, bombs, and missiles; of living in constant fear; of the unreliability of the Navy’s bombing notifications; of confining their daily personal, social, and recreational activities to accommodate the Navy; of curbing their main source of survival—fishing; of the extremely high noise level which has negatively affected the well-being and education of their children; and of having their island environmentally destroyed.

Therefore, the Viequenses have united under one objective—to oust the Navy from Vieques and, in the meantime, continue to curb naval operations on and around their island.

On February 6th, 1978, warships from the U.S. and its allies were to have engaged in naval exercises and aerial activities, missile launchings, and amphibious activities. Just before the Navy began its maneuvers, 40 fishing boats entered the restricted waters, thereby forcing the Navy to cancel its activities.

This was the event that precipitated the movement of the Viequenses against the U.S. Navy—a movement that has united people of different political beliefs and parties on that island. The direction for this movement has come primarily from two groups—the Fisherman’s Association of Vieques and the Crusade to Save Vieques. The membership of both organizations represents a broad spectrum of political beliefs and affiliations.

FURTHER CHALLENGES TO THE NAVY

Since the time of that intrepid confrontation at sea last February, others have taken place.

In March 1978, the fishermen and residents of Vieques attempted to gain a Temporary Restraining Order from the Federal Court in Puerto Rico to force the Navy to stop its bombing practices. This was denied to them by Judge

Toruella on March 15th; for Toruella, the Navy made the stronger argument through its rhetoric of “national defense” to support continued bombing.

After the February confrontation, several fishermen had been arrested and had had their fishing boats confiscated. But this did not hamper the organizational and political efforts of the Viequenses. On March 30th, 1978, 30 small boats in a “Tournament of Dignity” moved into a restricted area blocking scheduled activities. Upon their return, 1,000 Viequenses engaged in a spontaneous festival to reward the courageous fishermen and to celebrate their victory. And later, when all charges against the fishermen were dropped prior to their trials, the people began to sense the power and strength behind their efforts.

On April 9th, a car caravan of protest was held to denounce the Navy’s attempts to buy off the fishermen. The Navy had been offering them \$80.00 for nets that had been ruined as a result of naval maneuvers and \$40.00 for each week during which they could not fish in their waters. According to Carlos Zenon, president of the Fisherman’s Association of Vieques and a member of the New Progressive Party (PNP), “the Navy was never so good to fishermen all those years we suffered damages before we were organized.”

In May 1978, the largest military maneuver in the Atlantic—Operation Solid Shield—was scheduled to take place in Vieques. This maneuver was forced to be cancelled as a result of pressure from the Viequenses.

THE NAVY RETALIATES

Realizing the determination of the Viequenses, the Navy increased its retaliatory tactics, sometimes in a blatantly overt manner as with the harassment of the fishermen and, at other times, in a much more subtle way.

The Navy assigned Lt. Robert Eastman, who always appeared in civilian dress, to Vieques to talk to the fishermen and their families and influence them against the activists. Lt. Eastman even offered music classes to the Vieques High School through his connection with the school’s principal and with the consent of the school superintendent, both members of the pro-Navy Committee of Vieques.

Another tactic utilized by the Navy was the free day-long excursion trip on a Navy launch, which included free drinks and food. This was stifled by a picket outside the gate leading to the dock and as many as 60 cars went through the streets of Vieques asking the citizens to stay away. The word was spread: “Don’t sell your soul for the price of a Navy hamburger.” Eastman’s May 22nd music concert was also sabotaged despite the presence of police and Puerto Rican shock troops. These tactics are just part of

the Navy’s public relations strategy to buy off the Viequenses and to dissipate their struggle. But the fishermen and their families grew more determined in their struggle. And their number of supporters grew too.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Last spring, a court suit was filed by the Commonwealth government insisting that the Navy submit environmental impact statements on how its military practices were affecting the island of Vieques. To date, the Navy has not submitted such statements, despite its requirement by Federal and Commonwealth law.

While awaiting the decision of Judge Toruella, the fishermen and the Commonwealth asked the Navy not to continue its naval maneuvers on Vieques. The Navy chose to ignore this request and, as a result, last month, on January 20th, the fishermen resorted to “fish-ins” similar to those that followed the February 1978 confrontation.

The Navy, then, requested an injunction to have the fishermen stay out of restricted waters. In turn, the fishermen countered with a petition to have the Navy suspend its operations. Both requests went before the Federal District Court on January 24th and the ruling was in favor of the Navy and against the fishermen of Vieques. Once again, the rhetoric of “national security” prevailed in the courtroom, but not in the waters or on the island of Vieques. If the Navy thought that the character of the 1978 struggle was a militant one, they can be assured of heightened militancy in 1979, even if this means the arrest of many Viequenses. According to Eulogio (Tito) Bermudez, Assemblyman of Vieques, the fishermen will continue fishing in restricted areas: “Once one is arrested, all hell will break loose.” To obey the court order would mean the disappearance of the fishing industry from the island and the inability of the fishermen to support their families. According to Zenon, “the Court has decided that while the Navy becomes richer, the fishermen should die of hunger.”

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF VIEQUES TO THE US

Vieques, as part of Puerto Rico, is, therefore, part of a colony of the United States. When viewed in its entirety, Puerto Rico is of strategic military importance to the US. The Department of Defense is the largest, richest and most powerful agency on the island. At this time, the Navy is the main active-duty force there. It owns 13% of the land of the larger island of Puerto Rico and 75% of Vieques’ 33,000 acres of land. Hence, 26,000 acres of land in Vieques have been expropriated for naval interests, thereby forcing its residents to settle in an area in the center of the island. Whereas, prior to 1941, the 26,000 acres were predominantly utilized for the cultivation of sugar cane, they now are used for the cultivation of a destructive war industry.

Most of the Navy’s facilities employed for such ends, are located on the eastern end of Puerto Rico, at Roosevelt Roads Naval Base, and in Vieques itself. Roosevelt Roads supports special fleet functions, one of which is the operation of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range.

Vieques has a special relationship to this function. Besides the use of Vieques for naval gunfire, close air support, and air-to-ground exercises, huge amounts of ammunition and weapons are stored in hollowed-out mountains for use by the Atlantic Fleet in problems involving Africa and Central or South America. In addition, the military installations on Vieques assist and direct military operations of aggression and intervention in these areas. This was the case in the amphibious landing of U.S. troops in the Dominican Republic in 1965. It is even believed that Vie-

ques is being used to store large amounts of nuclear warheads. Approximately two weeks ago, the Navy was questioned on this issue. The Navy neither confirmed nor denied this. Whether or not this is the case, the Navy is omnipresent in Vieques and is using the euphemism of protecting the “national interest” to justify its grip on the island. In the process, it has violated the democratic rights of its residents; it has withdrawn 75% of the land from productive use; and it has diminished the Viequenses’ principal means of survival.

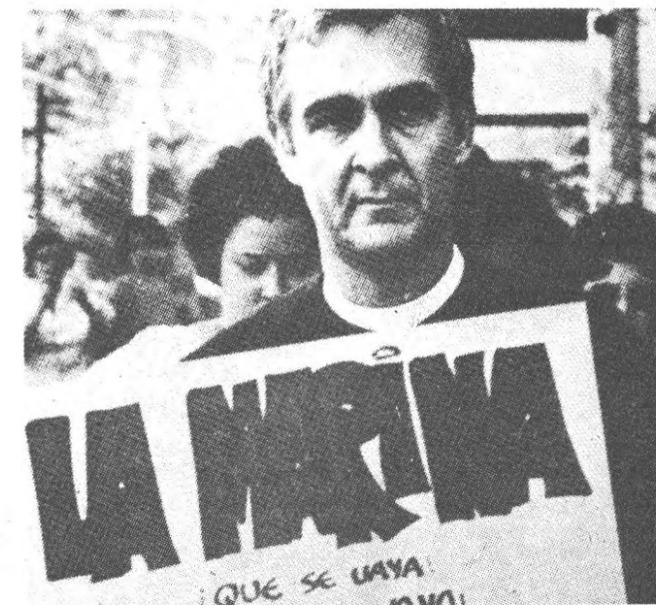
A PERIOD OF INTENSIFIED STRUGGLE

The media in Puerto Rico has indicated that the Federal Court will probably rule in favor of the Navy as it has in the past. Resultedly, the situation in Vieques in the next few weeks will become more intense with many Viequenses arrested and others suffering injuries as well. But the fighting will continue because the people of Vieques have no other alternative if they are to regain their rights and their land.

In this struggle, the people of Vieques are confronting the effects of colonial exploitation and domination. Their struggle is one between the just interests of the people—fighting to enjoy the fruits of their labor, and to determine their own destiny—and the imperialist interests of the U.S. military.

The struggle of the people of Vieques to prevent the US Navy from carrying out military maneuvers will be long and difficult, in the coming months, particularly considering the probability of the Federal Court’s decision in March in favor of the Navy. It will continue to require the organized efforts of the people of Vieques and Puerto Rico and the support of other progressive peoples. It is our responsibility to bring this issue to our communities and workplaces and to demonstrate our support at rallies, demonstrations, pickets, and all forms of educational activities.

We undertake these tasks from the premise that the struggle of the people of Vieques to oust the US Navy from their island is part of the overall struggle of the Puerto Rican people for national and social liberation. We, therefore, ask all concerned individuals and groups to join the Viequenses in their call: “Vieques belongs to us, let’s reclaim it!”



Supporters of the Vieques fishermen demonstrate their support. Sign reads: “U.S. Navy . . . You must go!”

THE WEBER CASE: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ON THE DEFENSIVE

Recently a legal suit of vital importance to national minorities, women and working people came before the United States Supreme Court. The "constitutionality" or legality of affirmative action programs which attempt to make up for the historical discrimination against minorities and working women in the areas of employment, education, housing, etc., is once again being challenged, this time in the case of *Weber vs. Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation*. The implications of the case, involving a white worker in a major U.S. corporation, are far-ranging. If the Supreme Court decides in Weber's favor, it could be the abolition of affirmative action programs in business and industry, a decision that would affect hundreds of thousands of minority workers—blacks, Latins, Asians, Native Americans, etc.—and women who have been able to maintain their jobs despite today's high unemployment rolls.

THE WEBER CASE

Brian F. Weber is a white laboratory analyst at a Kaiser Aluminum plant in Gramercy, Louisiana. He is challenging the legality of a voluntary affirmative action program between Kaiser Aluminum and the United Steelworkers of America. The program was designed to help remedy a situation in which there was almost a complete absence of black workers holding skilled jobs in the aluminum industry. It called for the creation of special training programs at 15 Kaiser plants, open to blacks and whites on a 50-50 basis until the minority representation in the skilled jobs was equivalent to minority representation in the labor force from which the plant recruited. In the case of Kaiser's Gramercy plant, blacks make up 39% of the workers in the area, but only 15% are employed at the plant. Moreover, only 6 out of 279 skilled jobs were filled by blacks in 1974 when the plan was first instituted.

Fourteen skilled positions were created at the Gramercy plant, filled by seven black workers and seven white workers. Weber applied for one of the openings but was turned down. Waving the banner of "reverse discrimination", Weber claimed that because he had seniority over two black workers who had been accepted for the openings, he had been discriminated against because of his race. The Weber case is based on the contention that such affirmative action programs violate Title VII of the Civil Rights act of 1964 (which prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis



Brian Weber standing in front of Kaiser Aluminum Plant in Gramercy, Louisiana.

of race, sex, age, religion or national origin.)

Two lower federal courts ruled in Weber's favor, stating that such programs were permitted under the Civil Rights Act only to correct past discrimination and to restore to their "rightful places" specific individuals who had been the victims of discrimination. The lower courts found that there had been no evidence presented to prove discrimination at the Kaiser plant, and therefore, no lawful basis existed for the affirmative action program. This was one of the arguments that the Supreme Court used in the case of Allan Bakke, who claimed "reverse discrimination" when he was rejected from a medical school that allotted 16 of its spaces for minority applicants.

In fact, specific evidence of past discrimination did come to light, although not through the efforts of either Kaiser or the United Steelworkers Union. The federal government and the Equal Opportunities Employment Commission recently presented evidence to the Supreme Court which had been gathered by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance in 1974. These findings revealed that in the past, Kaiser Aluminum had waived experience requirements for whites, but not for blacks, in filling skilled craft jobs at its Gramercy plant.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: AN HISTORICAL FACT

But even if there was no such "official" documentation of acts of discrimination at this particular plant, the need for affirmative action programs at Kaiser or any industry could hardly be challenged. Affirmative action programs in the areas of employment, education, and all vital areas of life are essential to eradicate the effects of this society's long history of institutionalized racial discrimination. Under-representation in most fields—particularly those that pay a living wage—and unequal opportunities for oppressed nationalities on a national scale is the historical reality that demands the need for such programs. To require more evidence, based upon a narrow and distorted interpretation of the Civil Rights Act, is to transform the concept of affirmative action from a tool of rectification to an instrument of mockery. Yet this is what the Supreme Court did with Bakke; it may also hold true for the Weber case.

BAKKE CASE: TIP OF THE ICEBERG

When the Supreme Court decided in favor of Allan Bakke last summer, it did not reject outright the concept of affirmative action. However, many people who participated in the struggle to overturn the

Bakke decision (including ourselves) understood that the decision would be used by reactionary forces who wanted to get rid of affirmative action programs in their fields, whether in education, training, employment, etc. Furthermore, although the court decision was made about a case in the field of higher education, it would be utilized to establish a precedent particularly in the area of employment. This analysis has proven to be correct. The Bakke case has become the tip of the iceberg. Since last summer, attacks on affirmative action programs have mushroomed, and most of these are employment cases. The Weber suit, attacking a voluntary agreement between the Kaiser Corporation and the United Steelworkers, is the most explosive of these cases. The case is currently being reviewed by the Supreme Court. A decision is expected in the spring.

In October, 1978, the Affirmative Action Coordinating Center (AACC) was formed. The AACC is a coalition of the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and the National Lawyers Guild; it was organized to develop a coordinated response to the growing number of cutbacks in affirmative action programs. Its primary objective is to form a network of progressive organizations and individuals to monitor the courts and other institutions for developments in affirmative

action attacks. The AACC is certain that neither Kaiser Aluminum nor the United Steelworkers will risk presenting evidence of past discrimination, which would then be an admission of their own racist practice. Therefore the coalition, along with dozens of other organizations and individuals from trade unions to political organizations, are filling an *amicus* (friend of the court) brief with the Supreme Court.

The role that the AACC is playing is a very positive one. However, applying pressure through legal channels alone is not sufficient. There must also be the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people, loudly and militantly demanding that affirmative action be supported. But in attempting to mobilize people, we should not repeat the error committed in the organizing efforts made in the Bakke case. People were mobilized, but when the Supreme Court made its decision, no basis of support had been developed to continue the struggle against the attacks after the decision. The Weber case and all such issues have to be placed within a context, the context of the current efforts of the ruling class to eliminate the concessions which particularly minorities have achieved through years of hard struggle. The focus of the Weber case is to undermine affirmative action, but its essential effort is to deepen the wedge between white and minority workers

and thereby depress the living and working conditions of all workers. What underlies the attacks is the economic crisis affecting this country, and the economic forecast made by even bourgeois forces, that the situation in the coming period will worsen. This means that the efforts of the ruling class to resolve its problems by attacking the standard of living of workers, and in particular the oppressed nationalities, will increase in the next year.

The building of a mass movement—and most importantly, the raising of people's consciousness in the process—is not something that can happen overnight, nor can the issue only deal with Weber, though at this time, it is a crucial issue to focus on. But if, in organizing and educating around the Weber case, progressive and revolutionary forces can generate this kind of understanding among the masses of people, then we will have taken a step forward in building the mass movement necessary to combat attacks on affirmative action and on the working class in general. ●

BOSTON SCHOOL PLAN THREATENS BILINGUAL PROGRAM

In the fall of 1978, the Boston School Department announced a reorganization plan for the entire Boston School System. Initiated by the new Superintendent, Robert Wood, this plan has been publicized as "decentralization." It claims to give parents more participation in the education of their children, to save money, and to rid the School Department of unnecessary administrators.

In the 1960's, decentralization of schools was a demand by poor and working class, particularly minority, parents to improve the educational services that their children were receiving. The large, centralized, tightly-controlled city school departments had no mechanism for real parental involvement. The demand for community control of local schools was at that time synonymous with the struggle for quality education.

Originally a term that represented the just demands of parents, the Boston School Dept. is today using the term "decentralization" to make it appear as if the reorganization plan will provide for more parent participation. In essence, they are trying to sell the plan as one which will improve the quality of education in Boston.

An examination of the plan reveals that there is no mechanism for parent involvement, and that it centralizes power at the top instead of dispersing it, not allowing for parent input. The organization chart depicts the Boston School system as a corporation: the chart emphasizes



business operations and relegates educational services to a small box in the corner. The 9 school districts set up are supposed to be the cornerstone of this plan, providing for local accountability and community input. But there are no lines of communication between the district offices and the central office. Thus the "decentralized" system is one that further centralizes power in the hands of the school bureaucracy.

The Bilingual Department is generally seen as a threat to the educational bureaucracy because it has strong

parent and community support, which developed over a period of years during the long struggle for bilingual education in Boston. As part of his plan to tighten the reins on the Boston school system, Wood tried to destroy the effectiveness of the Bilingual Dept. soon after he took office. Wood ordered the staff of the Bilingual Dept., which is composed of teachers assigned to administrative positions, to go back to classrooms or to the districts. While on the surface this might appear a progressive move (ie, more teachers in the classroom), the result would have been to render the program completely ineffective.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Bilingual Program in the city of Boston services nearly 10% of the school population in 8 languages: Spanish, Chinese, Italian, Greek, Haitian, Cape Verdian, Portuguese, and Vietnamese. In 1971, as a result of the militant struggles waged by working class parents from many different minority communities working with concerned teachers and community organizations, the first bilingual law was passed in Massachusetts. It was a victory for the democratic rights of national minorities to obtain an equal educational opportunity in the public schools. But the passage of the law was only the first stage in the struggle. Since 1971, parents and community groups, uniting themselves into the Bilingual Coalition have had to fight for even the most basic services for bilingual programs—books, supplies, adequate teaching staff, classroom space, etc. The national chauvinism and fiscal politics of the School Dept. prevented the real development and implementation of the program.

One of the ways in which the School Dept. sabotaged the development of the bilingual program was to refuse to appoint a permanent staff. In 1977, as a result of strong community pressure, the first permanent director was appointed. He was hired with the participation of parents, teachers, and community groups on the screening committee.

The Bilingual Coalition realized that the program had to be consolidated on the central level in order to address the crucial problems that existed in its implementation. Central coordination was needed to develop uniform curriculum; permanent teachers and other staff were needed as well as testing procedures and support services.

Given these conditions, as well as their history of militant struggle, the Bilingual Coalition responded vehemently to Wood's attempt to "decentralize" the bilingual program. They objected to his plan on the grounds there would be no department left if decentralization were implemented at this time. What was needed now was a strong centralized department responsive to the needs and interest of the families affected.

This past November, the Bilingual Coalition mobilized six hundred parents to a press conference at the School Dept. The parents strongly opposed the demise of the Bilingual Dept. and demanded participation in the formation of any new structure for the department.

THE BILINGUAL COALITION

Two of the leading forces in the Coalition are the Comité de Padres (Parents' Committee) and the Bilingual Faculty Senate. El Comité de Padres is a community organization of working class parents, mainly Hispanic, who are conscious of their children's right to a bilingual education and also of the need to struggle for it. The Bilingual Faculty Senate is a city-wide organization composed of bilingual

teachers and aides, that sees the need to promote and defend bilingual education. Both of these groups have played an important leadership role during these years in the fight to gain quality bilingual education.

The other groups in the Coalition are the Bilingual Master Parents Advisory Council, the City-wide Parents Advisory Council, the Chinese Education Committee, the Boston Progressive Education Project, and the Council of Hispanic Agencies. El Comité de Padres developed a position on Wood's plan for the Bilingual Dept. that was adopted by the entire Coalition. The plan adopted by the Coalition called for the development of a team to write and approve a new structure acceptable to all the groups in the Coalition. The mobilization of all the forces in the Coalition, as well as many people not in the Coalition, forced the Superintendent to bow to their demands.

The plan developed by this "implementation team" defended the need for a strong bilingual department as part of the current struggle for quality bilingual education. The plan calls for a centralized staff to deal with city-wide issues as well as people assigned to work in the local districts and individual schools. The plan has mechanisms



for strong parent participation. This plan has now been submitted to Wood. Now he must respond to the plan, a plan he never promised to implement. This is the next stage of struggle for the Bilingual Coalition.

The work of the "Implementation team" was the result of the honest decision made by community groups to demand involvement in the process of developing a new structure for the Bilingual Dept. But we must be very conscious of the way these kinds of structures can be used to diffuse militant mass struggles. At the point at which the team was established, the level of unity and struggle within the Coalition was exceptionally high. The development of this team must not be allowed to subordinate the mass struggle. A follow-up article will be written on the lessons being learned from this experience, particularly focusing on the need to guard against the cooptation of peoples' militant struggles for their democratic rights. ●

Power Struggle in Iran

CIVIL WAR LOOMS

"I invoke... the legal right and the vote of confidence of the majority of the Iranian people that has been given to me to accomplish Islamic objectives."

Ayatollah Khomeini

On the afternoon of January 16th, crowds filled the streets of Teheran and other major cities. A victory had been achieved: the Shah had left the country! The Shah's departure was a product of an 18-month long mass rebellion that eroded the bourgeoisie's authority to rule and paralyzed the national economy.

Prior to his departure the Shah named Shahpur Bakhtiar as Prime Minister. Originally a leading member of the Union of National Front Forces the coalition of parties in opposition to the Shah, Bakhtiar was expelled from the Front when he took power without forcing the Shah to abdicate. Thus Bakhtiar began his government representing only himself. His turbulent weeks in power have only served to underscore the political crisis of Iran and the weakness of the Bakhtiar government. Bakhtiar's only support has come from some of the generals of the armed forces and from U.S. imperialism. He has no legitimacy among the Iranian people.

Initially the crowds danced in the streets of Teheran and other cities celebrating the Shah's departure. Very quickly, however, the celebrations turned once again into massive protest—this time against the Bakhtiar government. It soon became evident that the rebellion had reached a crucial juncture: who would fill the power vacuum?

Three forces presently vie to provide the answer: the generals of the armed forces, the Union of National Front Forces, and Islamic leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Of the three, Khomeini is clearly the dominant force, with the Front attempting to play a conciliating role between the Islamic leader and the military.

THE MILITARY

The military in Iran still views the Shah as the only legitimate authority. This is why the generals have given their support to the Bakhtiar government. To U.S. imperialism and the Carter Administration, the high echelons of the military represent the next best thing to the Shah. Under a military regime, Iran's role as guardian of the Persian Gulf, its conservative influence in the region, its key importance as an electronic surveillance post of Soviet military developments and its extravagant purchases of U.S. military hardware would be continued. However, the length and breadth of the rebellion has put into question the repressive capabilities of a military govern-

ment. Moreover, the loyalty of the rank and file troops is at best dubious.

To the U.S., given the uncertain situation, support for the Bakhtiar government seems like the best move at present. In the past month, the U.S. has done everything in its power to prevent a coup. The Carter Administration has made several public statements urging restraint on the part of the generals. Air Force General Huyser, deputy commander of U.S. forces in Europe, has been in Iran since the first days of the new year, meeting with Iran's top generals, urging them to support Bakhtiar and to avoid a coup. However, given the fact that Iran's economy remains at a total standstill and Bakhtiar continues to lack any mass support, the possibility of a coup could easily become a reality.

UNION OF NATIONAL FRONT FORCES

The twenty-five years of political seclusion have made the parties that make up this social democratic front no more than shadows of the past. Although during the last days of the Shah and the early days of his departure, the Front seemed like a viable force to head a new government, their show of strength has disappeared. All that really exists is the names of the parties, several dozen elderly leaders without followers, and the memory of the nationalist rebellion of 1953. Although the leaders of the Front disagree with Ayatollah Khomeini's formulation of an Islamic Republic, their hollow strength has forced them to become his followers.

AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI AND THE SHIITE HIERARCHY

Ayatollah Khomeini and the religious hierarchy represents the leading force of the rebellion. Khomeini's picture is carried in every demonstration by thousands of people; his mandates, transmitted through the *mullahs* (the local Shiite priests), have directed the continual upsurge. On the 13th of January, Khomeini announced the creation of a Council of the Islamic Republic, which would install a new government and select a constitutional assembly.

Through the formation of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini intends to tie the knot between the church and state in Iran. His conception is to move Iran away from the corruption that has characterized its partial transformation into an industrial nation by instituting an absolute adherence to Islamic law.

Khomeini has developed close ties with Libya and the Palestine Liberation Front,



Portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini carried by his followers.

both of which have supplied his followers with arms. The arms have been stockpiled throughout the country. This implies that Khomeini will use force if necessary to overthrow the Bakhtiar government. However, since the departure of the Shah he has urged his followers to show restraint and has established ongoing contact with both the generals and the U.S. government.

THE WORKING CLASS AND THE LEFT

Throughout the rebellion, the role of the working class and particularly the left has been hard to discern. Information has only recently come out and reports are still contradictory. Organizations, representing different tendencies in the left (see OEM, last issue) have been visible in the universities, in some demonstrations and among the oil workers. The oil workers who have rejected calls from Ayatollah Khomeini to produce enough oil for domestic consumption have been led by left forces, though which ones remains unclear.

One of the major questions confronting the Iranian masses is to what degree will they support Khomeini's implementation of the Islamic republic. The support for him as an individual leader is clear. But whether or not the Iranian people want to submit to rule by priests and religious law is another question. This is particularly true among the more organized sectors of workers (e.g., oil workers) and the radicalized youth and students. Many Iranians who ardently support Khomeini as a symbol of opposition to the Shah, might hold back such support for an Islamic state. If this happens, as is likely, the possibilities of a civil war in Iran are great and the chance of a military coup increases. ●

NICARAGUA: THE FRUITS OF INSURRECTION

In the wake of the September popular insurrection in Nicaragua (See OEM, Vol 3, no.9), the United States has attempted to ease dictator Anastasio Somoza out without dismantling the political-military and economic structures over which he reigns. This would mean leaving the country's 7,500-man national Guard intact and passing Somoza's vast wealth (he controls most key sectors of the economy) to the state (dominated by the bourgeoisie) or leaving it in the hands of his family. This U.S.-sponsored option has become better known as "somocismo without Somoza."

The U.S. strategy during these past five months was two pronged. In the first place, the U.S. stepped up its efforts to reconcile the Somoza dictatorship with its main bourgeois opposition, the Broad Opposition Front—FAO. (The FAO was initially composed of various bourgeois parties, some parties from the left, progressive intellectuals and several trade union federations.) Secondly, the U.S. attempted to isolate the most progressive elements within the FAO—particularly those with links to the revolutionary Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN), the leading force in the popular uprising—from the bourgeois organizations. From the beginning, the U.S. said it would not support any negotiations or agreement in which the FSLN participated.

After 4 months of intense negotiations, the Organization of American States (OAS) mediating team—composed of representatives from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and the United States—failed to achieve any reconciliation between the Somoza dictatorship and the FAO. The primary cause was the failure of the U.S. to isolate the anti-Somoza popular forces. And in fact, the result of the U.S. failure was to broaden and strengthen the unity of these forces.

In October, 1978, the U.S. government first moved to break the growing links between the FAO and the FSLN Tercerista tendency. (This tendency disagrees with the analysis that concludes that the struggle in Nicaragua is of a protracted nature; poses that conditions are ready for an insurrection and for this to succeed they call for an alliance with social forces including elements of the bourgeoisie). The initial plan of the U.S., as presented by the OAS mediating commission, called for the departure of Somoza. Yet when the plan was made public, it contained provisions for a new government with the participation of several Somoza lieutenants. This resulted in dividing the Opposition Front, The Group of Twelve, a group of prominent intellectuals and professionals with close ties to the F.S.L.N. terceristas, split away from the FAO; the socialist Party of Nicaragua

(PSN) and the Central de Trabajo de Nicaragua (CTN), a labor federation, also left the FAO. Those organizations that remained—mainly the bourgeois parties—agreed to the U.S. proposal, which called for a plebescite on Somoza's fate. However, the FAO demanded the following before it would begin negotiating the particulars of the plebescite: an end to the state of seige and martial law; a general amnesty for political prisoners and exiles; and the absence of Somoza from the country during the voting.

By December 16th, Somoza acceded to these demands. But he released only 500 of the country's known political prisoners. Nevertheless, direct negotiations began between the weakened FAO and Somoza's representatives. Soon after, the OAS mediating commission formulated the following plan: a plebescite on Somoza's fate to held in late February or early March; voting to be supervised by the OAS; Somoza, his brother and his son would leave the country during the voting; should Somoza lose, he would not be allowed back into the country until 1981. The FAO quickly accepted this proposal, but Somoza refused it, claiming that OAS supervision of the voting would violate Nicaragua's national sovereignty.

The U.S. government responded by calling its negotiator back and threatening not to reconvene the commission unless Somoza became more cooperative. The first week after the new year, President Carter ordered Lt. General McAuliffe, head of the U.S.'s Southern Command, to travel to Managua, to work on Somoza's intransigence. At that time, Somoza came up with a counterproposal: supervision of the plebescite by Nicaraguan officials with observers sent in by the OAS. Somoza's tight control over the National Guard and state bureaucracy and his family's 30-year history of rigged elections gave his counterproposal the weight of a joke. The FAO then broke off negotiations with Somoza and the mediating commission.



POPULAR FORCES GROW

The struggle against Somoza by the Nicaraguan people has visibly continued since the September insurrection. FSLN armed actions, student and worker demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, etc. are daily occurrences. Two recent developments are of particular importance in the growth of the popular anti-Somoza forces: first, the development and growth of the United Popular Movement (MPU) and its call for the formation of a National Patriotic Front; second, the reunification of the three FSLN tendencies.

The MPU, a coalition of political organizations, mass organizations and combative labor federations, which includes the FSLN, was formed a year ago to give the popular forces organizational independence. The coalition has been instrumental in the establishment of neighborhood committees which have helped to coordinate confrontations with Somoza's National Guard. More importantly, it has provided ideological leadership during the current mediations with the OAS, pointing out that they are nothing more than U.S. manipulations to maintain the status quo.

As a step to further weaken the bourgeois opposition, the MPU called and recently established the National Patriotic Front with those forces which left the FAO: "the twelve", the CTN, the Popular Social Christian Party, and others. The initial basis of unity of this patriotic front was the non-participation in the OAS negotiations. Presently we do not have information on the fronts' other points of unity nor on its immediate objectives. But the shifting of the centrists to the side of the popular movement provides clear evidence that the bourgeois opposition has lost much of its influence. Thus, the field is opening up for the FSLN—led popular movement.

The second indicator of the rising strength of the popular forces is the recent agreement of unification of the three FSLN's tendencies. At a press conference

December 27, 1978, Tomas Borge, a leading member of the FSLN announced that the three tendencies had reached an accord to unite their political and military forces. He reiterated the FSLN's determination not to negotiate with Somoza and to intensify the armed struggle as the only way to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship.

During the next months we will learn more about the level and nature of both, the National Patriotic Front and the unity agreement among the FSLN tendencies.

There is no doubt that the initiative against Somoza has passed from the hands of the bourgeois opposition to the popular forces. ●