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Publication of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

July 3, 2015

USMLO 3942 N. Central Ave, Chicago, IL 60634



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Free Puerto Rico : 1-15



PUERTO RICO

Cancel the Debt! End U.S. Colonialism!

Puerto Ricans are demanding their right to self-determination and calling for an end to U.S. colonialism. This was evident in numerous recent actions, in Puerto Rico and the U.S., opposing U.S. imposed budget cuts, calling to cancel

the debt and more. The UN Decolonization Committee also again passed a resolution demanding the U.S. uphold its obligation and carry out the internationally recognized decolonization process,

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Charleston and Empowerment: 16-22



CHARLESTON, JULY 4 TERRORISM ALERT SHOW

Time for a New Constitution Empowering the People to Govern and Decide

On June 17, a horrific racist attack took the lives of nine African Americans, in a church, in Charleston, South Carolina. While a young white man carried out the attack, it occurred in the context of

the long-standing violence and racism of the U.S. state. This includes the many police killings of unarmed African Americans already this year and the genocide of racist

Charleston and Empowerment • 16

Resistance is Duty : 23-24



ATTACKS ON RIGHT TO EDUCATION

When Injustice is Law, Resistance is Duty

One of the issues facing those fighting for the right to education is how to respond to state laws imposing the various attacks on public education. In many states the attacks on working conditions of teachers as well as attacks on learning and thinking,

mainly using the Common Core curriculum and testing and evaluation regime, are being imposed through state laws. Significant changes to governance are also a part of the attacks, including eliminating the powers of elected

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TIME FOR A DEMOCRACY WHERE WE DECIDE!

July edition of **Voice of Revolution**

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Publication of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization
www.usmlo.org • office@usmlo.org • 716-602-8077
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I • Free Puerto Rico from U.S. Colonialism

which includes removal of the U.S. military from the island.

It is U.S. colonialism, which for 117 years has meant the raping of the island, her people and natural resources, and is now responsible for imposing massive debts on the country. While the many protests and determined resistance of Puerto Ricans is rarely in the news, the issues concerning U.S. imposed debt often are.


Wall Street financial vultures, notorious for their massive scams against the public concerning mortgages are demanding that Puerto Rico make debt payments a top budget priority. This means yet more budget cuts on top of the years of layoffs and funding cuts — all of which have shown that budget cuts are no solution. These debts are massive tributes to the vultures, who are parasites on the economy. They repeatedly take billions out of the economy, against the public interest for their own private gain. U.S. finance capital imposes these unnecessary and onerous demands for tribute without end.

The financiers reacted strongly when Puerto Rico's Governor Padilla, reflecting resistance in the country, announced that Puerto Rico will not be able to pay the debts and called instead for a moratorium. A moratorium is a just demand, as are the calls to increase funding for social programs like education and healthcare. As one of the students at a recent action opposing budget cuts said, "You can't continue to make us pay for your mess." A moratorium on the debt is just, needed now and must be broadly supported. Indeed, given the decades of stealing the wealth of Puerto Rico by the U.S., the debts must be canceled now!

Puerto Rico belongs to the Puerto Ricans not the Wall Street vultures. As a people they are perfectly capable of governing themselves if the U.S. would remove itself! Colonialism is a crime. Imposing massive debts that are paid over and over is also a crime. Current conditions of high unemployment and poverty show both have worsened the economy and living and working conditions for Puerto Ricans. This is further evident in the large numbers forced to leave the island to live in the U.S. What is needed is for Puerto Ricans to decide for themselves how to organize and run their economy. Private finance capital is not needed for the productive development of the country and indeed is harmful.

The U.S. invaded and occupied Puerto Rico on July 25, 1898. For almost 120 years the imperialists have refused to leave the island. She has instead been used as a major base for the U.S. military, resulting in massive destruction to the human and natural environment. The military is a constant reminder of U.S. control, and the terrorism that can and has been unleashed against resistance.

As well, Puerto Ricans are forced to serve in the military although they cannot vote in U.S. elections. And Puerto Ricans are



USA OUT OF PUERTO RICO

*The U.S. invades Puerto Rico on July 25th, 1898.
La Mordaza/The Gag Law in Puerto Rico.
Operation Bootstrap.
The Sterilization of Puerto Rican Women.
The 60 year bombing and poisoning of Vieques.
The assassinations of Don Pedro Albizu Campos and Filiberto Ojeda Rios.
Rfoads experimentation.
The Ponce massacre.
The arrest and incarcerations of the FALN and Los Macheteros in the 1980s.*

The above list is only a few of the atrocities and human rights violations the U.S. government has committed against the Puerto Rican People since they invaded Puerto Rico 117 years ago. A comprehensive list would be endless!

**Join The ProLibertad Freedom Campaign as we
DENOUNCE the 117th anniversary of the U.S. invasion
of Puerto Rico! Join us we celebrate our 117 years of
RESISTANCE!**

Poets/Performance artists:
**Rafael Landron * Bonafide * Not4Prophet * Marina Ortiz
Jesus Papoieto Melendez**

Saturday July 25, 2015 @ 2pm-4pm
Vigil and Speak out in front of the Mural of Don Pedro
Albizu Campos and Che Guevara on E. 105th St. and 3rd Ave.
(Take the 6 train to E. 103rd St.)

The ProLibertad Freedom Campaign
For more information on ProLibertad contact us at ProLibertad@hotmail.com or at the
ProLibertadHotline: 718-601-6751 Visit our website: www.ProLibertadweb.org

forced to submit to the FBI, notorious for its assassinations and terrorism against those who resist. Neither have any place in the country yet both serve as occupying forces.

Puerto Ricans are also supposed to submit to federal U.S. courts, not their own. This is what makes it possible for their publicly-owned companies, like that for electricity, to be taken over by a U.S. appointed receiver. U.S. bondholders in the company can demand receivership in U.S. federal courts if debts are not paid — and Puerto Rico is supposed to submit. All of these are indications of the crime of U.S. colonialism.

Puerto Ricans have a 117 year-long history of rejecting and resisting U.S. colonialism (see p.10). It is this culture of resistance that characterizes her people and is growing today, as seen in the broad unity of all demanding freedom for political prisoner Oscar Lopez Rivera.

Freedom for Puerto Rico would be a significant blow to the U.S., its military and dictate and a great achievement for Puerto Ricans and peoples worldwide. It is one of the great liberation struggles of our times, which demands: *Puerto Rico for the Puerto Ricans! Cancel the Debt! End U.S. Colonialism!*

PROTESTS REJECT MORE CUTS

Puerto Ricans Call for Increased Funding for Social Programs and Moratorium on the Debt

The people of Puerto Rico have been demonstrating against plans for yet more cuts to public sector workers, education and healthcare, in the name of paying the debts owed to Wall Street financiers. Students, professors and others recently used mass actions to block plans to cut about 1/5 of the funding for the public University of Puerto Rico (UPR). These actions followed strikes in previous years opposing tuition hikes and efforts to privatize the university. The proposed university cuts were part of a package of \$1.5 billion in more budget cuts proposed by Puerto Rico's Governor Alejandro García Padilla. More recently demonstrators in the U.S. and Puerto Rico demanded increased funding for healthcare, which Obama plans to cut by 11 percent for Puerto Rico even though Puerto Rico already contributes far more than it receives.

When President Obama visited in June, he was met by demonstrations that included calls to cancel Puerto Rico's debt and for the U.S. to uphold its obligation to submit to the United Nations decolonization process (see p.7). The U.S. colonization of Puerto Rico, including its massive military presence and continued control of budget issues, is responsible for the current worsening economic conditions. Puerto Ricans face about 15 percent unemployment rates and far higher poverty rates, forcing a majority (about 5 million) to live in the U.S. rather than on the island (about 3.5 million). Further, U.S. hedge fund vultures are securing massive profits through debt servicing and now contemplating taking over Puerto Rico's public companies using receivership.

Demands to Cancel the Debt

On June 29, Governor Padilla, reflecting the mass actions in Puerto Rico, announced that Puerto Rico would not be able to pay its debts and called for a moratorium on debt payments. These include 10 percent interest rates demanded by the hedge fund vultures. These vultures control about half of Puerto Rico's \$73 billion in debt. They are responsible for lowering Puerto Rico's credit rating to justify raising interest rates for debt servicing and more recently lowering them to junk bond status to set the stage for a takeover by private interests.

Facing huge pressure from U.S. financiers, on July 2, Padilla announced Puerto Rico's public power utility, Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) made a full \$415 million bond payment due July 1 and reached an agreement to continue negotiations with creditors to restructure its \$9 billion in debt. PREPA made the payment by selling \$128 million of short-term debt to the companies that insure its bonds, including Assured Guaranty Ltd. It also tapped reserves and used \$153 million from its general fund, the agency said in a statement. Incurring short-term debt commonly means paying even higher interest rates and utilizing its general fund means investments in infrastructure are



Students demonstrating in Puerto Rico against budget cuts and for the right to education

cut. As with most Wall Street debt, these have been paid many times over yet more is demanded.

The financiers are proposing two main means to further rob Puerto Ricans of the wealth they create. One is to allow her to declare bankruptcy, so as to ensure the financiers get their payments while workers do not. This would require Congressional legislation. Currently the Puerto Rican government owes about \$37 billion in pension obligations, for example. Experience in Detroit and elsewhere shows bankruptcy is a way for these pension funds to be handed over to the financiers.

A second more likely scenario, as it does not depend on Congress, is receivership. The Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority is the government-owned electric power company exclusively responsible for electricity generation, power transmission, and power distribution in Puerto Rico. However, PREPA bond covenants empower bondholders to seek a court-ordered receivership in the event of a utility default. Bondholders who live in the U.S. have standing to sue in federal court for the appointment of a receiver. They threatened to do this in February and are using it as their blackmail for securing payments now. PREPA has until September 1 to guarantee its debt payments or receivership is likely.

People in Puerto Rico continue to organize against the cuts, demanding increases in funding for social programs and canceling the debt so as to utilize the wealth created for public benefit.

NEW YORK PUERTO RICAN DAY PARADE

Demands for Increased Funding for Healthcare

Puerto Rico Healthcare Crisis Coalition

Today, June 14, in an act of brotherhood and solidarity, the New York City Puerto Rican Day Parade [along with demanding freedom for Oscar Lopez Rivera] sent a message to the federal government and President Obama: American citizens in Puerto Rico deserve equality in federal funding for healthcare. Federal healthcare funding rates for Puerto Rico are half the rate of mainland states. However, [people] of Puerto Rico pay the same social security and Medicare taxes as other residents of the United States.

Hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans, with banners, T-shirts and posters, mobilized to fight the latest move from the Obama Administration to cut an additional 11 percent from funding to the Island's Medicare Advantage program – on top of decades of underfunding. This latest cut brings the entire healthcare system to the point of collapse. The action included contingents of Puerto Ricans from Illinois and Florida and labor unions.

Today with our united voice, we are sending a strong message to President Obama: if we pay the same, we deserve the same.

Federal Healthcare Funding Rates for Puerto Rico are Half Rate of Mainland States

Puerto Ricans, who are U.S. citizens, pay the same Social Security and Medicare taxes as the other fifty states but get less.

- Puerto Rico's Medicaid program receives 70 percent lower reimbursement rate of any other mainland state and is capped.

- The Commonwealth's Medicare Advantage (MA) program is paid 60 percent of the average rate in the states – while also having the highest MA enrollment percentage in the U.S.

- The Island's Medicare reimbursement rates are 40 percent lower compared to the mainland.

- This funding gap will only increase after implementation of the U.S. Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) recent 11 percent cut to Puerto Rico's MA premiums, effective 2016.

- While CMS approved these drastic cuts for Puerto Ricans, at the same time it increased rates to the 50 mainland states by three percent.

- Sixty percent of the Island's population – over 2 million patients – receive their care through Medicare, Medicare Advantage (MA) or Medicaid.

- The Medicare Advantage program may no longer be viable next year if funding to insurers is not restored by CMS.

- The Medicare Advantage system's collapse will cause the migration of patients to Mi Salud, the Island's Medicaid program, resulting in a \$400-\$800 million cost to the already cash-strapped program.

Protests Block Education Cuts

Jared Goyette, PRI News

It is rare that a student movement faces off against a governor and wins [a small victory], let alone after just one large protest, but that is what happened in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico Governor Alejandro García Padilla relented Wednesday to student demands that he drop a proposal to cut \$166 million of funding from the University of Puerto Rico, or about 20 percent of the budget. The \$9.8 billion budget proposal released calls for a \$674 million reduction in government spending, but largely spares the university, though it does reduce student aid by \$5 million.

García Padilla's decision to reverse course came after thousands of students and their supporters filled the streets of San Juan May 13 to protest the cuts. As the Latino Rebels blog noted, the demonstrations were largely ignored by US Media, but that did not stop them from being successful — at least in the short term.

“I think it's a small victory. I think we need to take it with a lot of caution,” says Rebeca Agosta, a 23 year-old student activist at the University of Puerto Rico. “These measures seem to be temporary remedies. Our economy is barely surviving. We definitely need better solutions.”

Puerto Rico is facing a fiscal crisis with no easy way out. The island is over \$72 billion in debt, most of it to large U.S.

investors such as mutual funds, and is in the middle of an eight year recession with unemployment steadily over 13 percent. The government is struggling to raise revenues and faces high borrowing costs after its debt was downgraded to junk status last year.

For now, the students appear to have convinced the governor that cutting the university's budget is not going to help solve the problem.

“This experience has reminded us that when we come together, not just the students but the professors, the staff and the community, we are a force to be reckoned with, but it's not over,” Agosto says.

Students believe that the governor's proposal to cut university spending may have been a political maneuver intended to get support for his plan to implement a VAT or “value added” tax. Student leader Christopher Torres, a 25 year-old computer engineering student, says the governor told student activists that he would not have to cut the university's spending if the tax increase was approved. If the plan was to get their support, it did not work — students plan to hold a strike if the tax increase is approved.

Torres emphasized, “We're saying you can't continue to make us pay for your mess.”

A MANUFACTURED MALAISE

Puerto Rico's Economic and Fiscal Crisis: Made in the U.S.A.

Victor M. Rodriguez, Counterpunch

On Tuesday June 23, the Special Decolonization Committee of the United Nations heard 30 petitioners who came to denounce from various perspectives the colonial situation of Puerto Rico. For the 34th time the UN committee approved a resolution requesting that the United States allow Puerto Rico to exercise its right to self-determination and independence. In 1953, the U.S. and colonial administrators lied to the U.N. in order to get Puerto Rico off the list of territories that still had not achieved self-determination. They told the UN that Puerto Rico in 1952 had drafted a constitution and now was exercising self-determination. This despite the fact, as Jose Trias Monge, who was the Attorney General of Puerto Rico from 1953 and 1957 and a central actor in the colonial government revealed in his book, *Puerto Rico the Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* (1997) that the government of the United States, through the state department and the department of the interior said "Puerto Rico should still be considered a territory." Through political pressure in a smaller United Nations, the U.S. petition to remove Puerto Rico from the list was approved 26-16 with eighteen abstentions.

Despite the vote and since then, Puerto Ricans, increasingly from various political perspectives have trekked to the U.N. demanding that the U.S. fulfill international law with respect to the island. In recent years the number of United Nation members supporting Puerto Rico's request has grown from the time when Cuba and the Soviet Union and its allies were the only ones supporting Puerto Rico's efforts. Now, with the political and economic changes that have taken place in Latin America and the partial diplomatic re-trenchment of the U.S. in Latin America, the issue has received broad support from Ecuador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia and other nations who before were on the margins on efforts to denounce Puerto Rico's colonial status. In the recent Summit of the Americas in Panama last April, attended by President Obama and President Raul Castro, expressions of support for Puerto Rico were again broadly expressed.

But, the increasing fiscal and economic crisis ailing the island has brought more attention to Puerto Rico's colonial situation. Already some stocks have experienced a decline especially those related to municipal bonds, or insurers of municipal bonds. The recent comments by Gov. Alejandro Garcia Padilla of the Popular Democratic Party (supporter of the commonwealth status) that Puerto Rico would not be able to pay its \$73 billion debt caused strong reaction in the capital markets. That lack of liquidity because of lower tax revenues may even cause a government shutdown like in 2006. In addition a possible default that could take place in September 2015 will hit Wall Street investors who have played casino with Puerto Rican bonds, which are not subject to local or federal taxes. But, also, Puerto Rican elites have served as intermediaries for the financial predators from Wall Street engaging in corruption and enabling predatory lending policies.

A recent report commissioned by the government by Anne Krueger and two other former International Monetary Fund directors provided a prescription that will be worse than the disease, which ails the economy. One of the problems the colonial government faces is that its tax revenues continue to shrink as the economy stagnates and large numbers of Puerto Ricans, including professionals, emigrate. One of the suggestions was to reduce the minimum wage, which will have a deleterious impact on poverty and the capacity of the working population to pay taxes. In sum, the report places the weight of the economic crisis on the backs of working people of Puerto Rico.

In addition some political sectors, especially the conservative pro-statehood groups are trying to leverage influence to get congress to consider statehood for Puerto Rico. In order to gain support from members of congress they have allied themselves with the most conservative members of congress who attend fundraisers for their political campaigns despite the fact Puerto Ricans cannot vote for congress or the president of the U.S.

Recently in June Senator Don Young, Republican from Alaska, chaired the Natural Resources Committee where he heard petitioners on the issue of Puerto Rico's political status. A few days before he had participated in a fund-raiser in San Juan, Puerto Rico hosted by a Pro-Statehood Organization, Igualdad. The timing of the fund-raiser and the hearing was critiqued by many. Senator Young has raised close to \$147,000 from island donors in the last two decades. As before no positive steps came out of that hearing.

But visits to the United Nation, while important to keep the world's attention to Puerto Rico's colonial plight, have not produced changes in U.S. policy. Ironically, 60 years of no diplomatic relations with Cuba is beginning to change, including the re-opening of embassies. But the stalemate in Puerto Rico continues.

The efforts of political parties of the left and of civic organizations have become repetitive rituals that have not led to solving the 117 years colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. This issue becomes more pressing given the chaotic economic situation of this island of more than 3.5 million inhabitants who, as defined by the Supreme Court, inhabit a special legal space known as an "unincorporated territory" of the United States. In layman's terms Puerto Rico "belongs to but it is not part of" the United States.

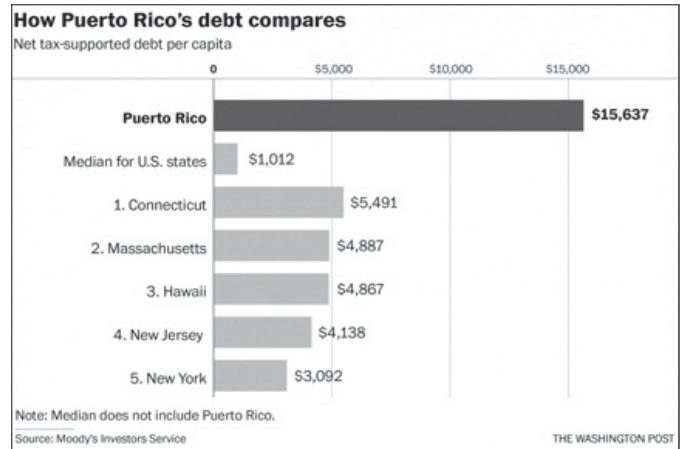
This new legal space was created, the "unincorporated territory," to facilitate the acquisition of territories if the United States so desired without having to grant statehood. The court members during most of the insular cases where almost the same justices as the ones who handed down the Plessey vs Ferguson decision which legalized segregation in the United States in 1896. The consequences of these decisions were that an unincorporated territory "could be kept in subordination indefinitely without the prospect

of future statehood.” (1)

The Supreme Court decisions called the Insular Cases are the legal structure that has legitimated the subordination of Puerto Rico for the last 117 years and served as the genealogy of the economic, social crisis that Puerto Rico faces today. With a public debt of \$73 billion, which is 96 per cent of Puerto Rico’s Gross National Product, just to service the debt the island has to use 44 percent of its revenue, unemployment is rampant (14.4 percent in 2014), labor participation rate is among the lowest in the world (40.6 percent), poverty is 46 percent (higher than any other state). This critical economic situation is worsened by the fact that Puerto Rico is totally dependent on the U.S. merchant marine [for shipping imports and exports], the most expensive in the world. The *Jones Act*, enacted in 1920 prohibits the island, which imports 85 percent of its food, from utilizing any other cheaper shipping alternative that according to one study increases the cost of living for the residents by about \$200 million. (2)

While there have been comparisons between Greece and Puerto Rico the reality is that they are totally distinct situations. Greece has sovereignty, Puerto Rico does not. Puerto Rico is unable to declare bankruptcy, cannot devalue its currency and cannot go to international financial institutions under the present colonial system. In fact one of the solutions offered in the United States to solve the chaotic economic crisis is to place the entire island in receivership. In other words, to go back to an even more rigid colonial system so that the bonds market can protect their investment.

It seems that the sentiment expressed by Simeon Baldwin in an analysis of the constitutional questions related to the acquisition of territories in the Harvard Law Review in 1899 (just after the 1898 colonization of Puerto Rico) still holds: “It would be unwise to give ... the ignorant and lawless brigands that infest Puerto Rico ... the benefit of the constitution.” The belief in the inferiority of Puerto Ricans to be provided their powers to find solutions was stated since the beginning by President Taft in 1909. This was in the midst of another economic conflict when the Puerto Rican legislature in an act of resistance against the colonial system refused to approve



the colonial budget. President Taft said in a message to congress that “Puerto Ricans were given too much power than was good for them.” (3). It seems that the culture and attitudes about Puerto Rico have not changed.

Victor M. Rodriguez, is a Professor at California State University, Long Beach.

Notes

1. Gerald Newman “Introduction” in *Reconsidering the Insular Cases: The Past and Present of the American Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2015.
2. Puerto Rican Senator Rossana López presided over a commission of the Puerto Rican legislature, which approved a resolution, and a report (Senate Resolution #237), which finds that cabotage law (Jones Act) cost Puerto Rico \$200 million and increases the cost of living by 40%.
3. Juan R. Torruella “The Insular Cases: A Declaration of their Bankruptcy and My Harvard Pronouncement,” in *Reconsidering the Insular Cases: The Past and Present of the American Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2015.

UN Committee Approves Resolution Calling on U.S. to Respect Puerto Rico’s Right to Self Determination

On June 23 Cuba’s representative to the United Nation (UN) Committee on Decolonization introduced the draft resolution calling on the UN to “guarantee Puerto Ricans their right to freely determine their own political situation.” He said, “We have witnessed for many years the urgent demand of the international community to act on this worthy cause,” noting that the Territory of Puerto Rico had not been able to exercise its right to self-determination for generations. He urged the U.S. to shoulder its responsibility to submit to international law and UN standards for the decolonization process. This includes removing all U.S. military from the island.

He added that Puerto Rico was a Latin American nation with its own clear identity. The resolution called for respecting the will of the Puerto Rican people, who had, on 6 November

2012, rejected its current status. The resolution took note of declarations adopted by the Summits of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which reiterated the character of Puerto Rico as a colony and expressed those countries’ strong support for the inalienable right to self-determination and full independence.

Further, the text called on the U.S. to complete the return of occupied land and installations on Vieques Island and in Ceiba to the Puerto Rican people. It called on that Government to respect fundamental human rights, such as the right to health and economic development, and to expedite and cover the costs of cleaning up and decontaminating the areas previously used in military exercises through means that did not worsen the serious consequences of its military activity. It also included a

call to release Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar Lopez Rivera. The resolution was passed by consensus.

We reprint below portions of the UN press release concerning statements given to the committee by various organizations from Puerto Rico and her Diaspora.

* * *

Speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Hossein Maleki (Iran), called for reinvigorating the work of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, known as the Committee of 24, to expedite its efforts towards full decolonization around the world. “Unfortunately, we are still far away from the full realization of the 1963 declaration on decolonization,” he said. The Movement reaffirmed its position on Puerto Rico, stressing the right of the people there to self-determination, he said. The colonial question there had been under the Special Committee’s consideration for more than 40

years, which had adopted 33 resolutions and decisions on the matter. The United States’ Government should assume its full responsibility to expedite Puerto Rican’s exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination and independence and to return the occupied land and installations of Vieques Island and the Roosevelt Naval Station.

Puerto Rico remained locked in a cycle of poverty, brain drain and sluggish economic development caused by the “imperialist” policies of the United States, the Special Committee of 24 was told as it heard from more than 30 petitioners on the matter and approved a resolution urging the United States to allow Puerto Ricans to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

Welcoming advocates from both Puerto Rico and its Diaspora community, the Special Committee heard that more than half of the island’s population lived in poverty, owing in large part to crippling trade policies imposed by the United States, the “colonial Power.”

Despite having been removed from the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 1953, Puerto Rico remained very much a colony of the “Yankee Empire,” petitioners stressed, calling for the island’s independence from the United States.

In that vein, the representative of the Frente Autonomista urged the United Nations General Assembly to take action to



ensure that the United States met its international obligations with regard to colonialism and took responsibility to decontaminate the Puerto Rican territory. Calling on that country to commit itself to a decolonization process, he demanded that all States help Puerto Rico with its economy and “stand on the right side of history.”

“This is an imperial situation,” asserted the representative of the American Association of Jurists, noting that the Territory was unable to establish trade relations with other countries, to the detriment of its economy. The “commonwealth” status hid the real situation of Puerto Ricans, which should be energetically condemned, he said.

The representative of the Movimiento Puertorriqueño Anticabotaje said that certain legal and trade restrictions — which had been put in place to stimulate American industry in Puerto Rico — constituted a “wall” that blocked economic

development on the island. “We need access to markets which will make the flow of raw materials to the world at competitive prices possible,” she said.

The island’s economy had deteriorated in recent years, said a representative of Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico, noting that half the population lived at the poverty level. Imported foods were required, which led to poor diets and high rates of non-communicable diseases. Meanwhile, the United States Government maintained the designation of “domestic terrorism” for Puerto Rican activists, such as Oscar Lopez Rivera, who had been held for more than three decades in American prisons.

Mr. Lopez Rivera — who had been convicted of seditious conspiracy in the United States — was a central figure in today’s discussion, with many speakers calling for his immediate pardon and release. “He is a living legend in Puerto Rico,” said the representative of the National Lawyers Guild International Committee, adding that “the clamor for his release is a unifying factor, a call for justice and human rights across party lines, national boundaries, and religious and political beliefs.” [...]

Also participating today were representatives of Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Cuba, Ecuador (on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Syria.

Destructive Practice of Government Debt to Private Lenders

K.C. Adams

(The article below addresses government debt to private lenders, primarily U.S. financiers, in Canada. It is applicable to the situation in Puerto Rico, the U.S. and elsewhere, where the demands raised are for public control, including canceling the debts and turning the financial sector into a public utility that serves the public good.)

* * *

Government debt to private lenders at [all levels of government] is an extremely damaging aspect of the anti-social offensive. Canadian governments annually pour \$60 billion of public funds into the coffers of finance capital as unnecessary interest payments. The cumulative tribute has climbed to \$1.1 trillion since 1974, when U.S.-led international finance capital dictated an end to government borrowing from the Bank of Canada. The anti-social practice of governments borrowing from private lenders and paying the ongoing interest, resulting in enormous public debts, has become yet another neo-liberal excuse to impose austerity on the people and cut social programs and public services.

Public debt to private mostly international institutional lenders has no reason to exist. It has become an enforced form of tribute within the U.S.-led imperialist system of states. Some Canadians contend this form of tribute paid as a consequence of private lending to governments is illegal and have launched a lawsuit to prohibit the practice. They argue that the publicly owned Bank of Canada by law is obligated to provide loans to governments at low or zero-interest rates, as was practiced from 1938 to 1974.

Neo-liberals say public loans to governments from the Bank of Canada are inflationary, as they may increase the money supply beyond an increase in the value of the country's goods and services. This argument is deceptive and contrary to the historical experience of capitalism.

The deception arises from the fact that all institutional lending either public or private increases the money supply, as the amount loaned is greater than the reserve of social wealth the institution holds. If the borrowing results in productive employment of the working class, the newly produced value should be greater than the borrowed value. The reason for inflation is not whether government or any borrowing comes from public or private sources but the use to which the borrowed money is put.

The neo-liberal argument regarding inflation is also contrary to the historical record. During the formative period of capitalism, the practice of private entrepreneurs borrowing from private owners of social wealth at interest rates less than the anticipated average profit greatly accelerated the development of the forces of industrial mass production. This modern practice stood in stark opposition to feudalism and its forces of scattered petty production and retrogressive practice of usury, which

overwhelmed and captured all profit inhibiting any growth.

With the overthrow of the feudal state, the new capitalist state began the practice of government borrowing not only from public accumulation but also based on the prospect of future production of value greater than the borrowed amount. This method of state borrowing for material and social infrastructure projects became an effective method to advance the aim of nation-building.

Any loan, public or private, that results in workers producing added-value, reproducing the value of their capacity to work, and transferring already-produced value into new production adds to social wealth in excess of the original loan. Such a practice cannot be inflationary.

Any loan, public or private, that results in spending without workers producing new value, such as for war or the buying and continuous transfer of already-produced social wealth in hopes of increasing it without producing anything, does not add to social wealth. Such borrowing practices may increase the money supply beyond an increase in the overall value of the country's goods and services and lead to a cheapening of the currency and rise in prices.

The economic thesis of a general benefit from government borrowing from the Bank of Canada was proved in practice through the post-WWII formative years of Canadian nation-building. The Bank of Canada, a Crown corporation, furnished public funds to the three levels of government mostly for the building of material and social infrastructure and public services, without causing any serious price inflation. The total value of public material and social infrastructure and public services increased enormously in the early post-war period.

This situation existed under the overall conditions of the post-war social contract between the Canadian working class and owners of monopoly capital. The progressive trend demanded by the victorious anti-fascist forces after WWII called for a restriction of the powerful merged monopolies of financial and industrial capital that had caused recurring crises and disasters during the first half of the twentieth century. Important was the demand for the financial sector, not just the Bank of Canada, to become a public utility making funds available at low or zero interest rates throughout the economy for productive development and to strengthen the material and social infrastructure, including health care and education for all.

The reactionary trend refused to accept the anti-fascist verdict of WWII and opposed any restrictions on class privilege and monopoly right. On the financial front, the reactionary trend demanded an overall regression into government borrowing from private institutional sources controlled by the monopolies.

The most powerful owners of social wealth in the U.S. launched an attack in Canada against the verdict of the anti-

fascist war using their political, economic, military and social connections and power. [...]

The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) is an organization of finance capital consisting of sixty countries within the U.S.-led imperialist system of states. The BIS is one of the forms, including the IMF and World Bank that ensnares all into the clutches of finance capital dominated by U.S. imperialism creating conditions for unprecedented flows of tribute to the most powerful owners of social wealth.

The BIS insists on the privatization of government borrowing, which means that Canadian governments contrary to Canadian law and statutes can only borrow from private mostly global monopoly lenders. The dictate of finance capital has led to an unprecedented public debt to private lenders with a continuous flow of public tribute into their coffers.

The people led by a conscious and organized working class with its own independent politics can put an end to finance

capital's anti-social austerity agenda and nation-wrecking. The consolidation of an organized force for change based on concrete political work with links on the ground is the key to political renewal, to turning around the anti-social offensive, restricting monopoly right, ending class privilege and building the new.

A new direction for the economy includes extricating Canada's financial institutions from the clutches of U.S.-dominated institutions such as the BIS, IMF and World Bank, restoring government borrowing from the Bank of Canada and realizing the necessity to transform the financial sector into a public utility.

Finance capital imposes unnecessary and onerous demands for tribute without end. Private finance capital is not needed for the productive development of the country. Canada is quite capable of providing investment money from its own public resources based not only on public accumulation but also on the prospect of new value the working class can produce when mobilized and actively working.

Puerto Rico's Culture of Resistance

July 25 marks the 117 anniversary of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Puerto Rico and her resistance to U.S. colonization. As part of saluting that resistance we are posting below a presentation by Dr. Luis Nieves Falcón, great patriot, organizer for independence and defender of human rights, who died last year. Important developments were taking place at the time the speech was given (2001). Fourteen years later, important achievements have been made, such as the expulsion of the U.S. Navy from the island of Vieques and freeing of Puerto Rican independence fighters held as political prisoners in U.S. jails.

However, independence fighter Oscar López Rivera still remains imprisoned (see June VOR). The work to demand the Navy clean up and pay reparations for the horrendous environmental and human damages as a result of its use of Vieques as a bombing range is also developing. The struggle to end Puerto Rico's oppression and status as a colony of the U.S., reflected in demands in Puerto Rico to cancel the debt and reject the austerity agenda of the U.S. and its Wall Street hedge funds also continues.

The Puerto Rican people's indomitable spirit and fight to realize their right to be, as an independent nation, is one of the great national liberation struggles of the modern era. We urge all our readers to become informed about it and lend their full support to *Independence for Puerto Rico!*

Puerto Rico was under the domination of the Spanish regime for 400 years. During those 400 years there was a continued struggle against the Spanish colonial domination of Puerto Rico. In 1868 we had our biggest confrontation with the Spanish regime, which we call Grito de Lares, which signals our most significant national episode, the question of independence. As a result of those 400 years of struggle, two things were accomplished.

By 1898 you have what you could define or describe as the

Puerto Rican nation. What is the Puerto Rican nation? It is one that was formed in the struggle of the native Indians against Spain. Spain decimated the Indian population in three years but the Indians continued the struggle until almost the 19th century. In that struggle against Spain, the Indians were joined by the African slaves that came to the Americas who also started fighting against the domination imposed on them by slavery. In fact, on some of the lesser Caribbean islands you have something called the Black Caribs, which is merely a combination of the Africans and of the groups of Taíno indigenous people of the islands. Added to these, a group of poor white settlers who were left by the Spaniards joined in the struggle against the domination of Spain.

So, what you find in the formation of Puerto Rico is a culture of resistance. We resisted the Spanish regime for 400 years, we have been resisting the United States for more than 100 years and it is in our nature to resist any kind of domination. Because, after all, I think that what Puerto Ricans have defended throughout all the years — with the constant resistance and the constant confrontation with the colonial regimes — is their sense of dignity and their sense of pride as being different and proud of being different.

So at the end of 1898 with this resistance struggle, with this particular Puerto Rican nation emerging, this forced the Spanish regime to provide Puerto Rico with an autonomous charter. The autonomous charter gave the Puerto Rican people, first, the right to voice a vote in the Spanish Parliament and Spanish courts. Secondly, we had our own coin system, our own postal system, our own telegraph system and we had the right to enter into commercial agreements with any country of the world. If Spain entered into a commercial agreement that in any way affected Puerto Rico, the contract could not go into effect unless it was approved by the Puerto Rican Legislature. So, in a sense, in 1898 we had a lot of autonomy which amongst other things tended

to preserve the distinct character of Puerto Rico as a nation within the Spanish domain.

U.S. Colonization

In 1898 we had the Spanish-American War, in which as you know, the United States started war with Spain, allegedly on account of the Cuban revolution against Spain. The truth is that the Cubans never asked for the help of the United States because they knew that if the United States interfered, then their next battle would be against the United States. History proved that they were right and that Martí was right and that the Cuban patriots were right.

As a result of that war in which Spain was a very debilitated empire, in the negotiations for the Treaty of Paris, the United States requested that Puerto Rico be given to the United States as a spoil of the war. Puerto Rico was not part of the war, there was no revolution going on in Puerto Rico, it was going on in Cuba. Spain objected and instead suggested that it would give the United States the Philippines in exchange for Puerto Rico. The American negotiators said, "Oh, no, we also want the Philippines." This was a major blow for the Philippines. There was a revolution going on in the Philippines and as a result of the American intervention, the leader of that revolution was killed by the United States and the Philippines became another colony of the United States.

So that is how Puerto Rico came to be a U.S. territory. We believe that the transfer was illegal. The transfer was illegal because the Puerto Ricans were not consulted and the legal relations, the pact which regulated the regulations between Puerto Rico and Spain, required that any treaty affecting Puerto Rico should be approved by the Puerto Ricans. Needless to say, Puerto Ricans didn't participate in any of the negotiations.

The immediate action taken by the United States was to eliminate the autonomous charter. From that moment until today, we haven't been able to get back the political achievements that we had won in that charter. So in a sense, the political situation of Puerto Rico now, in 2001, is worse than what we had in 1898 as a result of the autonomous charter.

Today the political relation of Puerto Rico with the United States is clearly defined by two decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. One decision said that Puerto Rico belongs to, but is not part of, the United States. In the other decision, the Supreme Court said that Congress has plenary sovereign powers over Puerto Rico. Inherent to those plenary sovereign powers is the "right" of Congress to discriminate against Puerto Rico regarding its decisions. With these two decisions, the Supreme Court acted to uphold the colonial status of Puerto Rico to the United States



Puerto Rican patriot Pedro Albizu Campos.

and this status has never changed.

In 1952, the U.S. made some attempts to hide this status. There was a lot of international pressure at the time against colonialism — countries from Africa and Asia had become liberated and had a very strong voice in the United Nations. The U.S. passed a law they called Commonwealth Law 600. This put the label of Commonwealth on Puerto Rico.

My friends, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico did not alter in any sense, in any way, the colonial status with plenary control by the United States over Puerto Rico. For example, as of now, 2001, any law passed by the Puerto Rican Legislature can be revoked by the U.S. Congress without giving any explanation to the island. Secondly, allegedly we

have a Supreme Court, but all the decisions of the Puerto Rican Supreme Court can be revised by any U.S. federal court. The status of these courts is inferior to the Puerto Rican Supreme Court, yet they decide. This means that all judicial decisions are superseded by U.S. control.

There is not a single facet of the life of the Puerto Ricans that is not controlled by a U.S. institution and by U.S. law. The control is all inclusive. We cannot make trade or business treaties with other countries, radio permits are given by U.S. federal agencies, television permits are given by federal agencies, transportation is given by federal agencies, etc. There is not a single aspect of Puerto Rican life that is not controlled by the United States.

This reality has shown that the 1952 Commonwealth law was a scheme to disguise a truly colonial power in Puerto Rico. This has also been revealed by the UN Decolonization Committee. For 17 years, the UN Decolonization Committee has passed a resolution stating that Puerto Rico has not resolved the issue of self-determination and has requested that the United States, according to international law, establish procedures to ensure that Puerto Rico asserts its right to self-determination. Naturally, the United States has ignored those 17 resolutions through all these years.

Puerto Rican Resistance to U.S. Colonial Domination

If we had resistance against Spain over those 400 years, you couldn't expect less against the U.S. From 1898 on there has been resistance against the colonial domination of the United States. In the '20s and the '30s, this resistance was shown in strikes all over the island by workers from all sectors of the economy. Why? Because at that time, the monopolistic interests of the sugar barons were coming into Puerto Rico. Agriculture as a whole was being dumped in order to establish a monopoly of sugar production by the sugar barons. The small farmers and

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farmworkers were displaced and other workers as well. So in the '20s and the '30s there was a period of strong resistance. During that period the Nationalist Party emerged.

The Nationalist Party is really the first open expression of rejection of the American colonial domination in Puerto Rico by a political party, and the first expression of a Puerto Rican party that would confront the United States by any means necessary. The leader of that party was Pedro Albizu Campos who some of you may know. After studying at Harvard, he went to Puerto Rico to fight American colonialism. He is one of the most important revolutionary figures of Latin America in the 20th Century.

The party started holding demonstrations, confronting the United States, organizing the workers. In 1937 they organized a peaceful demonstration on Palm Sunday, a religious festivity in Puerto Rico, in Ponce. They had a permit to hold the demonstration. All of them were massacred by the Puerto Rican police, which had been militarized by the American Governor of Puerto Rico. The Governor very clearly said, "This is a war. We are at war with the nationalists." Their favorite expression was, "kill the women and children." The American Civil Liberties Union at the time wrote a report condemning this massacre.

From then on, there was systematic and persistent persecution and repression of anyone who the U.S. colonial establishment thought was either a sympathizer or a defender of independence. Pedro Albizu Campos was jailed and tried for seditious conspiracy.

If you are acquainted with the legal history of the United States, seditious conspiracy laws were enacted during the American Civil War and they were directed towards the southern States in order to prevent their separation from the Union. These laws against seditious conspiracy were never applied to the institutions of the Confederacy nor its generals. They were never applied until 1937 in Puerto Rico, against Puerto Rican patriots. From that day on, the seditious conspiracy laws have been used as an instrument for the persecution and incarceration of the nationalists, of those fighting for the right of Puerto Rico to self-determination.

The evidence used against Albizu Campos were ten speeches that he delivered in public squares on the island. He was condemned to ten years and served an additional two years because he refused to accept some parole conditions and he wanted to complete his own term. Then, after he came out he started organizing again.

Despite all the persecution of the Independentistas in 1950, we had an armed revolution against the United States, La Revolucion de Jayuya. Jayuya is a town in the central part of the island and the revolutionary movement was led by a woman.

The United States used all its military force; their air force bombed Puerto Rican towns. The revolution was defeated and most of the Independentistas were either killed, incarcerated or

had to leave the island in order to survive. It seemed as if the issue of nationalism and the Puerto Rican Independentistas had been quelled and subdued. But you all remember the 1954 attack on Congress. A Puerto Rican group, nationalists, again led by a woman, Lolita Lebrón, attacked Congress in order to show the world the colonial situation in Puerto Rico. One of them was killed, one was sentenced to die in the electric chair. Due to international pressure, the sentence was commuted to life in prison. When President Carter came to power, he released them. At that time they were the political prisoners who had spent the longest time in jail in the western hemisphere. They had been in jail for 30 years.

As a result of these attacks and arrests by the U.S., the destabilization of the Nationalist Party seemed to be almost complete. How then can you explain that the feeling of resistance still continues to emerge despite everything that the Americans have done to crush it?

In 1980, a group of Puerto Ricans in the United States and in Puerto Rico again began organizing. They too were incarcerated, persecution continued and surveillance of Puerto Ricans increased. The FBI's Cointelpro [counter-intelligence program], part of a strategy of the FBI to destabilize opposition in Puerto Rico, was used against the people. For example, the FBI had bombs placed in the post offices and in the supermarkets. Then they said that the Independentistas were the ones who placed the bombs. We only found out about it many years later through the Freedom of Information Act.

Despite all this, the resistance continues. A new manifestation of that resistance is Los Macheteros. This is a clandestine group which believes in armed struggle. Its leader was charged by the United States because he resisted arrest by the FBI. They had almost an army to arrest him. He exchanged fire with the FBI. He was tried in the Federal Court in Puerto Rico and the 12 Puerto Rican jurists decided that he was not guilty -- that he shot back in self-defense, defending his life and his wife.

Three days after he was freed, the federal agents tried to charge him outside of Puerto Rico, because they knew that outside Puerto Rico they could get him sentenced. But when they came to arrest him, he had already gone underground, into clandestinity. From clandestinity he still continues the struggle against the United States.

The important thing I think to realize is, first of all, the horrendous persecution that has been targeted towards all Puerto Ricans who give a semblance, not only of a feeling of independence, but of a nationalist feeling, of pride in Puerto Rico as a nation. To give you an example, for many years, until 1952, to wear the Puerto Rican flag was a crime. To fight this, what we did was wear a little flag beneath our shirt collar. If we saw some comrade whom we thought was with us, we'd raise it up and we knew then that we

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were of like mind.

The Puerto Rican anthem was also forbidden, but it was not only the anthem, it was the idea behind the anthem. For example, in 1971 there was a university strike. The police strike force came to beat up the students, so we started singing the anthem. They beat us up. We stopped singing the anthem and started singing "La Marseillaise," they still beat us. Then we started singing "The Star Spangled Banner." They still beat us, because what they were trying to beat down was not the songs, it was the spirit. And that they have not been able to eliminate.

In that struggle against being persecuted because you are Puerto Rican, because we did not identify with the Spaniards, we do not identify with the North Americans, you can see the resistance. If you ask any Puerto Rican for his or her nationality, "I am Puerto Rican" is the response.

We do not have a passport. We have to carry the U.S. passport that was imposed on us in 1917. At the time, the Puerto Rican Legislature said, "We don't want the American citizenship." But the First World War was going on and the United States needed resources, especially soldiers for the war. By imposing American citizenship on the Puerto Ricans, they were forced into the army. If you did not accept being recruited, you were sent to jail for five years. So they were able to use us as cannon fodder for their imperialist adventures.

The Struggle to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners

Currently, one of the main struggles against the persecution of the Puerto Rican people is the struggle to free the political prisoners, many of them arrested in the 1970s and '80s. The conditions of the prisoners have been horrendous. Never could you imagine that an alleged democratic country, that an alleged civilized country, could impose such conditions on human beings.

For example, Alejandrina Torres, sentenced to 35 years, was 48 when she was arrested. The Americans constructed a maximum security prison 12 feet underground in Lexington, Kentucky. There was a campaign to close Lexington some time ago on the grounds that its conditions were inhuman. This is where Alejandrina Torres was imprisoned, in a small room with lights on 24 hours a day. She was not allowed visits from family, no one except the lawyers, no books, no one to talk to her. She was raped three times by the guards in the prison while she was there. I recall that once when I went to see her, she had lost about 40 pounds. You remember those children from Biafra, famine children with their skin just touching the bones. That was the condition of Alejandrina. She was in a dying tomb. She was kept isolated.

The jailers said, "You have the key to change the situation, and the key is to renounce independence and tell us who your collaborators are." For 20 years she refused and resisted. We managed with an international campaign and the help of human rights people from all over the world to force the United States to take her out of Lexington and move her to a different prison. Finally, she was one of the ones who was liberated in 2000.

Another example is that of Oscar Lopéz Rivera. He was kept in solitary confinement for eight years. This is what solitary confinement means, brothers and sisters. He was kept in a very small



Dr. Nieves Falcón with former political prisoner Alicia Rodríguez upon her return to Puerto Rico in September 1999.

room with the light on 24 hours a day, no books, no visits. Only his lawyer could visit and each time the lawyer was subjected to strip searches.

The ordeal of going to see the prisoners was also horrendous. I studied law in order to become their lawyer so I would be able to visit them without the whole prison bureaucracy. Every time I went to see him, a strip search. In fact sometimes I had four strip searches going in and four strip searches after I left him. The whole point was to humiliate and intimidate us.

Again we initiated a campaign. We finally were able to modify his conditions of solitary confinement. Oscar refused President Clinton's pardon because the conditions for him were not acceptable.

We succeeded in freeing 11 people in the year 2000 on conditions that were unbearable but that, with continued struggle, we have been able to change. We also organized to help these comrades who came out to adjust to their new life -- to see the Puerto Rico that they had kept in their souls and in their minds. All I can tell you is when these comrades arrived in Puerto Rico, the whole island came to the airport to greet them as heroes because we really consider them heroes. [Applause] Eight of them decided to stay in Puerto Rico.

We are now working for the liberation of Oscar, Carlos Alberto Torres, who was not pardoned by President Clinton, and for Haydeé Beltrán, who did not want to be part of any process requesting pardon for her. The three of them have still between 25 to 30 years to do. Bear in mind that with this new Bush administration, the road is very hard. But we are going to get them out. We are not going to stop and we are going to continue fighting for their liberation. [Haydeé Beltrán was freed April 14, 2009; Carlos Alberto Torres was freed July 26, 2010. Also facing arrest in 1985, Avelino González Claudio evaded U.S. authorities until 2008. He was sentenced to a seven-year prison term in 2010 and won release in 2013 — VOR Ed. Note.]

FREE PUERTO RICO FROM U.S. COLONIALISM

U.S. Navy Out of Vieques!



Alongside the long-standing political persecution in Puerto Rico was the military establishment that the Americans imposed on the island. The U.S. established 17 bases on the island, which is just 100 miles long by 35 miles wide. There are excellent roads connecting the military network. The roads were not made to help the Puerto Ricans. The roads were made because they need to move fast from one base to the other.

In the framework of using Puerto Rico itself as a military base, the U.S. decided that Vieques, an island municipality of Puerto Rico, was an excellent place for them to carry on military exercises. Initially they developed what we have called the "Dracula Plan." The "Dracula Plan" required that all the people living in Vieques be moved out of Puerto Rico. It also required that all the corpses in the cemetery be moved out so that the Vieques residents would not have any reason to come back. It was just too much, this "Dracula Plan," they could not carry it out. Instead, in 1941 they expropriated two-thirds of the land of Vieques. They took the eastern third and the western third of the island and they left only the middle for the people of Vieques. Many of the people of Vieques were displaced to St. Croix or to other parts of Puerto Rico.

The expropriation process was terrible. People were given 24 hours to abandon their homes. If they didn't, bulldozers razed the place to ensure that nobody remained. The testimonials of that experience are terrible. On account of the tension and the forced move, pregnant women had to give birth on the grass. Women and men that resisted were horribly beaten up by the Navy officials conducting the expropriation.

Then Vieques became a place where things happened that not even the Puerto Ricans on the island knew about. It was very "hush-hush," very secret. The Navy decided that on the weekends during exercises, they would give furlough weekend passes. Every weekend 1,500 Marines would land in Vieques for recreation. What that meant was that the people of Vieques had to shut themselves in their houses and not come out because any woman or any young man found on the street was subject to sexual attack by the Marines. The Marines would break down the doors of the houses and there were weekends when all you saw was an open battle between the Marines and the people of Vieques. The struggle got so strong and the people of Vieques got so angry that

eventually the Marines had to drop the furloughs. But continuous harassment remained.

The military exercises involve shooting from the west to the east and from the north to the south, as well as bombings. People in Vieques experience that shooting constantly when the military exercises are going on. The fishermen cannot fish.

The people of Vieques started going into the target areas to obstruct the military bombings and practices. They had small boats and the Navy used speedboats to displace the small boats. The people of Vieques developed two tactics to fight the speedboats. One was fishing nets. They put a big iron chain on the net and threw it in the water. The chain would get in the speedboat propeller and force it to stop. The other one is in a sense biblical. The people would put a piece of iron on a slingshot, take a good look and, "Bam!" the driver of the speedboat was hit and they were forced to go.

So that same spirit of resistance was there but at the time, during the '90s, it was mainly limited to the people of Vieques. Then in April 1999, in a very negligent act, the Navy dropped two bombs near a sentry house. A Puerto Rican was at work there and it killed him. The people said this was the last straw. They started another campaign, developing another strategy, a strategy of civil disobedience. Civil disobedience was the means they had at hand to struggle against an empire as strong as the United States.

Building the Movement Against Colonialism, Oppression and the Denial of Human Rights

Keep in mind that these two issues, the issue of the political prisoners and the militarization of Vieques, are nothing but overt manifestations of colonialism. But in addition to being overt manifestations of colonialism, they are also a manifestation of oppression and wide spread denial of human rights. What is happening in Vieques, this oppressive condition, has been globalized by the imperialist powers. This kind of oppression you can also see in other parts of the world. But some times we don't see what is going on. We have made the connection and we also have learned that when we are fighting against the oppression and abuses of human rights and dignity in Vieques, we are fighting for the elimination of oppression and indignity in all parts of the world. In fact, when we are fighting for the dignity of the people of Vieques, we are also fighting for our own dignity.

In addition to these examples, how are the people of Vieques and Puerto Ricans on the main island now responding to all the indignities imposed by the U.S. colonizing power? There is a growing consciousness of the illegitimacy of the institutional regimes. People are realizing that in working towards the solution of their problems they have to go beyond the structures of religious organizations and government institutions, beyond the structures of existing political parties. These traditional institutions have persistently contributed to maintaining a division among the people favorable to the dominating political and economic interests and consequently preventing the people from developing their own empowerment.

How do we overcome this since the colonial domination has developed such a negative attitude towards the name, the label,

of Independentista? We knew that we had to deal with the meaning attributed to this label and not let this categorization tie our hands in the work we were doing. We found that although the people rejected the label Independentistas, they did not reject individual elements that comprise the total concept. For example, they thought Puerto Ricans should have more control of their economic situation. They thought that the Puerto Ricans should have more control of their cultural situation. So the elements inherent in the concept of independence, the individual elements, these were not rejected by the people.

We developed our work, realizing that what happened to Vieques or what happened to the political prisoners was really a violation of human rights and a violation of the dignity of the people. We brought together a group of about 60 people, from ages 17 to 65. We trained them on the meaning of human rights, elaborating what the concept of dignity means in terms of the recuperation of individuals. We trained them intensively and then we said "Now this is the test." We went door to door throughout an area. We went every weekend, the whole group. We went to a municipality and everyone went knocking: "I am a member of the Human Rights Committee. Will you allow me to talk to you about the Puerto Rican political prisoners?" Generally the people let us talk about it. We distributed written material and also called on people to sign our petition. We did this throughout the entire island, in all sectors.

I can tell you it is one of the most beautiful experiences that I have had. For example, we started in an area that was a very central town, a very remote kind of situation. We went on Sunday and we waited outside a church as the people started leaving. Then we started talking with the people. The priest came along and asked, "What are you doing?" We explained and he started calling people over. The Mayor was one of the people there and he said, "I want to call my daughter and her fiancé so they will help you go around the town."

So we know now that it is false to say that the people don't really have any ideological commitment. It is there. You just have to develop it. We have to bring it out and we did that throughout our work.

Then we went to the White House to present the petition on behalf of the political prisoners. They themselves would not sign as part of their refusal to recognize the authority of U.S. government over Puerto Rico. They would not ask for their release, so we went there. We had 250,000 signatures. The same day, we published a quarter-page ad in the New York Times and the Washington Post. When we went to see the Attorney General, she already knew about the newspaper ads and she already knew about the thousands of bundles of petitions that were in her office calling for the liberation of the Puerto Rican political prisoners.

This work on the petitions allowed us to make the people conscious. A person doesn't have to believe in independence in order to support the liberation of these people because here the issue is a grave violation of human rights and human dignity, regardless of what you might think otherwise. We managed to get very reactionary people in terms of political affiliations and beliefs to side with us. In a way, we managed to start to develop



a consensus and the people managed to start seeing that they could grapple with and deal with an issue outside the traditional institutions of society.

I believe that because of this ideological groundwork that we did, the U.S., using the Puerto Rican statehood party, tried to pass a law to make English the official language. English had been the official language in the school system. When I was in school I was forbidden to speak Spanish. If I did, I was punished. In 1952 the Secretary of Education circulated an internal memorandum that made Spanish the language in the public schools, though not the private schools. Now the government wanted to make English the official language again.

The people massively came out in protest. The people were more advanced than the leaders of the existing political parties. These leaders got frightened and they passed the official law -- which we are going to repeal in one or two years. But the demonstration by the people was really something incredible.

After this, and after presenting the petitions to the White House, we called a march in support of the political prisoners. This was still considered a taboo topic because the U.S. always tries to say the prisoners are terrorists. But we felt we had dealt with this, so we called a march in November 1999. People told me, "Luis, we are not going to have more than 1,000 people. I don't think this is good because it will show how weak we are."

I tell you we worked. In one week, we covered the whole country, going to all 77 municipalities, to all the universities and to all the labor leaders. We really worked hard. We had 150,000 people in the demonstration. The largest march to date in the history of Puerto Rico. [Applause] Two weeks after the march, 11 of the political prisoners were released. Although the assistant to the President said the march had nothing to do with it, we think that the march had a lot to do with it. [...]

Then the issue of Vieques and getting the Navy out came to the fore. We started following the same strategy. No human being can tolerate this violation of human rights and this violation of human dignity. Another march was organized in support of Vieques. The government told the people not to go to the march, just like they did with the political prisoners, but this time we had 300,000 people in favor of Vieques. (*Originally published in TML Daily, cpcml.ca, Vol. 31, No. 115, July 5, 2001*)

I • Charleston and Empowerment

mass incarceration. It was an attack engendered by the racist U.S. state, with its support and protection of Nazis and groups like the KKK — and its refusal to guarantee the equal rights of all. Such a guarantee is the minimum required for a wealthy productive country like the U.S. But conditions today, and the entire history of the U.S. shows it cannot provide equality, cannot provide even the most basic rights of education, housing, healthcare and a livelihood. It cannot eliminate its racism because it is a necessary weapon for repression and exploitation, during slavery and today.

This attack also occurred in the context of growing resistance to racist state violence, as evident in the many “Stand with Charleston” actions that took place and the continuing resistance in Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland and elsewhere. Racist state violence is used to terrorize and divide those resisting it and standing up for rights.

Charleston itself is an example of this. Denmark Vesey, a founder of the Mother Emanuel Church, where the recent attack occurred, was also an organizer for a broad insurrection in 1822, uniting African Americans enslaved on the plantations and free in the city, with the support of whites too. This effort to arm and free slaves was met by state terrorism against those who resisted, including executing Vesey and burning the church to the ground. But efforts then and now have persisted in uniting all to stand as one against such state racism and violence, as could be seen in the united march in Charleston and elsewhere June 21.

For July 4, people were greeted with yet another show of force by machine-gun wielding police at airports and train stations nationwide, especially in New York City, supposedly in response to a “terrorist” threat. The FBI and Homeland Security repeatedly issue such threats, but more than 40 such “high alert” warnings since 9/11 having occurred with no such threats materializing. It is evident that they are used to justify yet more U.S. terrorism abroad and more police repression at home. New York State, for example, recently hosted a joint “terrorism” exercise that brought together first responders, policing agencies from all levels and the military to prepare for potential “emergencies.” First responders, like firefighters and healthcare workers have long opposed being used as a repressive force against the people. These exercises are a means to eliminate that resistance and force them to be part of an integrated policing force, commanded by the military,



United action in Charleston opposing racist state attacks and affirming the struggle of the people for rights and equality

for use against the people.

The failure of the “war on terrorism” to solve any problem and the increasing inequality, racism and terrorism of the U.S. state indicates that the existing rulers have no solutions. The U.S. Constitution has not prevented the inequality and terrorism of the U.S. state and cannot do so — that is what experience has shown.

Far from modernizing democracy, including a new constitution that enshrines the rights of all, the U.S. state is going backward. It is increasingly concentrating power in the executive, especially the president but also governors, while eliminating elected governance, such as local school boards. This too is no solution.

The people, through their many and varied actions, are showing that they do have solutions and can move society forward. The times demand a modern democracy of our own making, where the people decide. It demands a new constitution that puts rights at the center, guaranteeing them and making it a government crime to fail to provide equal rights for all. It is time to discuss what such a modern democracy looks like, what elections and legislatures should look like, and to join in efforts to begin creating such a democracy today. Such efforts include organizing to be decision makers in our collectives, at work, in schools, in organizations, in our united actions. The issue of *Who Decides?* and the people’s answer *We Decide!* is something on the agenda in every battle against state racism and for rights. It is a guide to action to persist in. Decision making cannot be handed over to others but must be kept in our hands as we advance our program and initiatives. This is our society, these are our rights and *We Decide!*

“Stand With Charleston” Actions Across the Country

In streets, faith spaces, and community centers across the country, people took action to honor the nine African Americans massacred in Charleston and demand an end to state-organized racism and violence, by the military, police and those protected by them. Six of the nine people were women and two were reverends. Marches and rallies took place in more than 30 cities on June 21, including those in Texas, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, Colorado, Nevada, California and elsewhere. People are recognizing that the killings in Charleston are not isolated but take place in the context of the broad and long-standing racism and violence of the U.S. state. The actions expressed the unity of all against such racist violence and a determination to step up the fight for equality. As signs put it, people demand *Equal Rights for All! The Government is Guilty and Must be Held to Account!*

People from the broad movement that has emerged against racist police killings, together with those from immigrant and workers' rights organizations, anti-war activists and others, stood as one. Links were made between the militarism and aggressive wars of the U.S. against peoples abroad and the racism and brutal attacks on people at home.

Discussions of various kinds have brought out that people like Dylann Roof, the confessed killer of the nine people in Charleston, do not emerge in a vacuum but rather as a reflection of the racist U.S. state. His support for Nazis and racist groups exists because the U.S. state as the biggest defender and supporter of the Nazis, brought thousands of them to the U.S. and has itself filled the shoes of Hitler ten times over.

It was the U.S. state that backed and defended slavery and segregation and that imposes the genocide of mass incarceration and promotes and sanctions police killings today. It is the U.S. state that fosters and spreads a culture of racist violence and impunity for those that carry out its attacks, whether they are part of the military or the militarized police forces. It is the U.S. that has bombed mosques and terrorized whole countries and whole communities, providing the example that such violence

is acceptable.

The people are saying *NO!* loud and clear. The various recent actions also demonstrate that government violence against protesters and resistance, as has occurred at the many rallies against racist police killings and brutality, will not stop the resistance. Charleston has shown this by example. The church where the killings occurred was a center for slave insurrections, for the fight for civil rights and today against police brutality. Despite being burned to the ground in the past and now contending with this racist killing right inside the church, it will stand strong and celebrate its 200th anniversary next year.

Actions that followed, also across the country, demanded the removal of the Confederate flag as a symbol of government racism and slavery. Petitions, demonstrations and much outrage was expressed that such a symbol of reaction was still flying on statehouses. While efforts were made to turn this into an issue of “southern pride,” and divide people north and south, what was ignored is the fact that it is the U.S. government that enshrined slavery and segregation from its beginnings.

One reason the confederate battle flag and statues of confederate generals still exist is that following the Civil War, none of these generals was ever tried for treason or even charged with crimes. The generals and other confederate leaders were not held to account, not condemned by the government. So it is little wonder that symbols of the confederacy remain.

Consider, by comparison, the stand taken toward the nazi flag and symbols. Nazi flags were torn down and ripped to shreds and outlawed by governments as part of the peoples' victory over fascism. The racist U.S. state, having defeated the southern aristocracy, then restored them to power so as to repress the drive of the people for democracy and preserve the racist U.S. state. As resistance at that time and today show, it is the struggles of the people themselves, for equal rights for all, that is condemning government crimes of the present and past. Change that favors the people is being waged by targeting the racist U.S. state first and foremost and stepping up the fight for the rights of all.



We Were Never Meant to Survive: A Response to the Attack in Charleston

Alicia Garza, June 19, 2015

Wednesday night (June 17) in Charleston, South Carolina, an act of terrorism was committed against a group of Black people who gathered in prayer. The church, Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, was a site of slave rebellions as far back as 1822 and one of the oldest Black churches in the country.

Our hearts and our prayers are with the families and communities of those who were needlessly killed.

Yesterday, a 21-year-old white man named Dylann Storm Roof was arrested alive, suspected to be the gunman in this brutal and horrific tragedy. Roof went to the church and asked specifically for the pastor. He prayed with the congregation, and then after about an hour, he rose and said, "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go."

In the days following this one, many in the media will portray Roof as a mentally ill gunman with a troubled past who committed an isolated crime against an unsuspecting group of Black people. Facebook photos show Roof wearing a jacket with patches bearing the flag of apartheid South Africa. However, we at #BlackLivesMatter would assert that this is not, in fact, an isolated incident, but just one incident in a pattern of state violence enacted against Black people in this country and around the world.

The real question we should be asking is: Who taught Roof to hate Black people, enough to kill nine of us, in a sanctuary? And can we really say that he is the only one?

The honest answer to the above question is that this country has never valued Black people — even though Black people have been of extreme value for this country.

Where are the calls for accountability for those who taught a young white man to harbor such a serious hatred for Black people? Where is the accountability for a nation that has racism in its very DNA?

We were never meant to survive. We were stolen from our families and our land, brought to this country in the bottoms of boats, chained together like animals. We were forced to work for, nurture and nourish, and build a country that never truly considered us human and still refuses to honor our humanity. The founding documents of this country designate us as only three-fifths of a human being. When we dared (and dare) to reclaim our humanity, we were (and are) beaten, lashed, hung from trees, limbs cut off, set on fire, shot and raped. This is not something that happened in the past. This is still happening to Black people in 2015. In fact, just a few months ago, Otis Byrd was found lynched, hanging from a tree outside of Jackson, Mississippi.

We were never meant to survive. We argue that Roof's actions are not isolated, are not easily and dismissively attributed to mental illness but instead are reflections of a disease that plagues

this country — racism. And we argue that until we grapple, as a nation, with the racist [state] violence that infects this country, we will only see such acts increase.

Roof's words remind us that Black people in this country cannot consider ourselves safe anywhere. We cannot expect protection from the police. We cannot expect to be safe in swimming pools, in churches, in stores, on buses, in our communities or even in our homes. Black children are not safe. And we cannot consider ourselves safe from the daily trauma of witnessing the violence exacted against our communities. In this case, a young Black girl played dead underneath her grandmother's dead body in order to stay alive. Roof left one woman alive, telling her that he wanted her to tell the story of what happened that night.

The truth that needs to be told is that even our nation's first Black President has yet to face the fact that violence against Black people is an epidemic of epic proportions. [...]

President Obama made a statement on Thursday, saying, "Once again, innocent people were killed in part because someone who wanted to inflict harm had no trouble getting their hands on a gun." Despite what our president says, this is not merely an issue of gun control. In fact, this is an issue of the prevalence of *structural* anti-Black racism that results, in many cases, in anti-Black violence, and in too many cases, anti-Black murder.

Across the country and increasingly around the world, Black people — young, old and middle-aged; disabled and differently abled; queer; transgender; immigrant; incarcerated and more — have erupted in a wave of rebellion that has transformed our political landscape. And yet, there are still those who, in the face of extreme and unnecessary violence, will use that as an opportunity to call for peace, to distort the real issues, to essentially neutralize what has been bubbling under the surface for a very long time.

But where are the calls for accountability for those who taught a young white man to harbor such a serious hatred for Black people? Where is the accountability for a nation that has racism in its very DNA?

We, as a country, in the face of even more Black lives taken way before their time, have a choice to make. It is no longer a question of whether or not racism exists, nor is it a question of whether or not racism is an epidemic that plagues our very existence. The choice we have to make is whether or not we are willing to take it on in a real way.

Our lives, quite literally, depend on it.

(Alicia Garza is an organizer, writer and freedom dreamer living and working in Oakland, California. She is the special projects director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance and co-creator of #BlackLivesMatter, a national organizing project focused on combating anti-Black, state-sanctioned violence.)

DENMARK VESEY A FOUNDER

Charleston's 'Mother Emanuel Church' Long a Center for Resistance

Charleston's Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, otherwise known as "Mother Emanuel," has long been a center of resistance to government organized racism and violence, such as that by the KKK and the slave-owners before them. It is the site of the recent massacre of nine unarmed African Americans by Dylann Roof. His action takes place in the context of the long-standing state backing of racist and nazi organizations, like the KKK and Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), the modern reincarnation of the old White Citizens Councils. The KKK has long been backed by the FBI, which commonly, under the guise of "infiltrating," knew and was a part of KKK terrorism. Similarly, the Citizens Councils have elected officials, sheriffs, and businessmen, acting to secure their privileges and the power of the racist U.S. state.



Next year, will be the 200th anniversary of the founding of Mother Emanuel. It was 1816 when the Rev. Morris Brown, together with Denmark Vesey, formed it under the umbrella of the Free African Society of the AME Church. They were one of three area churches known as the Bethel Circuit. It was a free church formed in the heart of the confederacy that thrived for 50 years before the start of the Civil War. It had a congregation of almost 2,000, roughly 15 percent of black people, including the enslaved, in what was then the majority-black city of Charleston.

As a center for organizing for African Americans, enslaved and free alike, the church was often raided by police and private militias. The state used their racist laws at the time, which dictated the hours when slaves could be out among "the public," prohibited teaching slaves to read at Bible study sessions, etc. It is probably not accidental that Roof chose such a bible study session to attack.

Slave Rebellion Leader Denmark Vesey a Founding Member

One of the founders of Mother Emanuel was Denmark Vesey, organizer of one of the largest slave revolts. It was blocked before it could be carried out but the scope of planning and stand to free and arm slaves was unprecedented.

Vesey was born into bondage on St. Thomas Island. At age 32 in 1799, he won a city lottery of \$1,500 that, in the islands, allowed him to buy his freedom from slavery. But he did not have

the funds to buy freedom for his wife and children. He also vigorously opposed the system of slavery and was determined to end it as well as his second-class status as a free black. He planned an insurrection mobilizing black people both on the plantations and in the city. The plan involved thousands, and was to liberate the slaves, arm all resisting to sack the area plantations and then sail to Haiti, which had liberated itself from slavery 20 years

earlier in its own revolution. The plan, to be carried out in 1822, was audacious in its scope and remarkable in its reach.

Vesey was one of five insurrection leaders executed on July 2, 1822, two days before Independence Day. The proximity was said to have inspired Frederick Douglass's speech delivered almost exactly 30 years later on July 5, 1852, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" where he thundered, "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license..." (see p.20). Douglass would later use the profound love and support for Vesey to recruit for the all-black Civil War 54th Regiment, known for its bravery and determination.

The violence of the state in response to the insurrection planed was brutal. In addition to the five, thirty more were executed that month, 32 condemned to exile and 130 black people were arrested. Four white men were also fined and imprisoned for supporting the insurrection. As part of this state organized campaign to spread fear and stop resistance, using legal and extralegal terrorism, Mother Emanuel Church was burned to the ground.

Despite the government terrorism and executions, people refused to become informants and talk about this broad organized insurrection. The state terrorism did not stop people from gathering and it did not end Mother Emanuel, which to this day is a center for organizing resistance. When Charleston police recently killed unarmed African American Walter Scott, shot in the back, the church was part of organizing to demand justice. As Mother Emmanuel's Reverend and State Senator Clementa Pinckney, one of those killed has said, to win freedom and justice for the people, "...Sometimes you've got to make noise.... Sometimes you may have to die like Denmark Vesey... Sometimes you have to march..."

“For Revolting Barbarity and Shameless Hypocrisy, America Reigns Without a Rival”

Frederick Douglass, July 4, 1852, Rochester, New York

Fellow citizens, pardon me, and allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? [...]

I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you this day rejoice are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. [...]

Fellow citizens, above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions, whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are today rendered more intolerable by the jubilant shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, “may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!”

To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs and to chime in with the popular theme would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world.

My subject, then, fellow citizens, is “American Slavery.” I shall see this day and its popular characteristics from the slave’s point of view. Standing here, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this Fourth of July.

Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity, which is outraged, in the name of liberty, which is fettered, in the name of the Constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery — the great sin and shame of America! “I will not equivocate — I will not excuse.” I will use the severest language I can command, and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slave-holder, shall not confess to be right and just.

But I fancy I hear some of my audience say it is just in this circumstance that you and your brother Abolitionists fail to make a favorable impression on the public mind. Would you argue more and denounce less, would you persuade more and

rebuke less, your cause would be much more likely to succeed. But, I submit, where all is plain there is nothing to be argued. What point in the anti-slavery creed would you have me argue? On what branch of the subject do the people of this country need light?

Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it. The slave-holders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia, which, if committed by a black man (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of these same crimes will subject a white man to like punishment.

What is this but the acknowledgment that the slave is a moral, intellectual, and responsible being? The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that Southern statute books are covered with enactments, forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read and write. When you can point to any such laws in reference to the beasts of the field, then I may consent to argue the manhood of the slave. When the dogs in your streets, when the fowls of the air, when the cattle on your hills, when the fish of the sea, and the reptiles that crawl, shall be unable to distinguish the slave from a brute, then I will argue with you that the slave is a man!

For the present it is enough to affirm the equal manhood of the Negro race. Is it not astonishing that, while we are plowing, planting, and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver, and gold; that while we are reading, writing, and ciphering, acting as clerks, merchants, and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators, and teachers; that we are engaged in all the enterprises common to other men — digging gold in California, capturing the whale in the Pacific, feeding sheep and cattle on the hillside, living, moving, acting, thinking, planning, living in families as husbands, wives, and children, and above all, confessing and worshipping the Christian God, and looking hopefully for life and immortality beyond the grave — we are called upon to prove that we are men?

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? That he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to understand? How should I look today in the presence of Americans, dividing and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom, speaking of it relatively and positively,

negatively and affirmatively? To do so would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding. There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven who does not know that slavery is wrong for him.

What! Am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood and stained with pollution is wrong? No — I will not. I have better employment for my time and strength than such arguments would imply. [...]

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would today pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of

the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced.

What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mock; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States at this very hour.

Go search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

Zero for 40 at Predicting Attacks: Why Do Media Still Take FBI Terror Warnings Seriously

Adam Johnson, Common Dreams

On Monday, June 29, several mainstream media outlets repeated the latest press release by the FBI that country was under a new “heightened terror alert” from “ISIL-inspired attacks” “leading up to the July 4th weekend.” One of the more sensational outlets, CNN, led with the breathless warning on several of its cable programs, complete with a special report by The Lead’s Jim Sciutto in primetime.

The threat was given extra credence when former CIA director — and consultant at DC PR firm Beacon Global Strategies — Michael Morell went on CBS This Morning (6/29/15) and scared the ever-living bejesus out of everyone by saying he “wouldn’t be surprised if we were sitting [in the studio] next week discussing an attack on the US.” The first piece of evidence Morell used to justify his apocalyptic posture, the “50 ISIS arrests,” was accompanied by a scary map on the CBS jumbotron showing “ISIS arrests” all throughout the U.S.

But one key detail was missing from the graphic: None of the “ISIS arrests” listed involved any actual members of ISIS, only members of the FBI — and their network of informants — posing as such. (The one exception being the man arrested in Arizona, who, while having no contact with ISIS, was also not prompted by the FBI.) So even if one thinks the threat of “lone wolf” attacks is a serious one, it cannot be said these are really “ISIS arrests.” [...]

As I have previously shown, in the media’s rush to hype the threat, the fact of FBI-manufactured — or at least “assisted” —

terror plots is left out as a complicating factor altogether, and the viewer is left thinking the FBI arrested 50 actual ISIS sleeper cells.

Nevertheless, the ominous FBI (or Department of Homeland Security) “terror warning” has become such a staple of the ongoing, seemingly endless “war on terror” we hardly even notice it anymore. Marked by a feedback loop of extremist [government] propaganda, unverifiable claims about “online chatter” and fuzzy pronouncements issued by a never-ending string of faceless Muslim bad guys, and given PR cover by FBI-contrived “terror plots,” the specter of the impending “attack” is part of a broader white noise of fear that never went away after 9/11. Indeed, the verbiage employed by the FBI in this latest warning — “we’re asking people to remain vigilant” — implies no actual change of the status quo, just an hysterical nudge to not let down our collective guard.

There is only one problem: These warnings never actually come to fruition. Not rarely, or almost never, but — by all accounts — never. No attacks, no arrests, no suspects at large.

Here is a selection of previous FBI and DHS “terror warnings” over the past 14 years, not a single one of which actually predicted or foiled a terror attack:

October 2001: “Potential use of chemical/biological and/or radiological/nuclear weapons“

November 2001: California bridges

February 2002: “Hollywood studios”

TARGET U.S. STATE RACISM

May 2002: Statue of Liberty
June 2002: “Around the Fourth of July holiday”
July 2002: Stadiums
August 2002: “Landmarks”
October 2002: “Al Qaeda to attack Amtrak”
November 2002: “Spectacular Al Qaeda attacks”
February 2003: “Apartments, hotels, sports arenas and amusement parks”
May 2003: “Possibility of multiple attacks”
May 2004: “Attempt to affect the outcome” of presidential election
July 2004: “Military facilities and large gatherings,” July 4th
August 2004: VA hospitals
January 2005: Dirty bomb
March 2005: US/Mexican border
October 2005: NYC & Baltimore subways
March 2006: “Sporting events”
June 2007: Colleges
December 2007: “Shopping malls in Chicago and LA”
November 2008: “Al Qaeda to attack transit during Thanksgiving”
November 2010: Mass transit in New York City
October 2011: “Americans in Europe” facing “commando-style Al Qaeda attack”
February 2011: “Financial institutions”
May 2011: “Threats of retaliation”
June 2011: Al Qaeda “hit list”
July 2011: “Private jets of executives” involved in drone manufacturing
September 2011: “Small planes”
September 2011: “New York City or Washington around...10th anniversary of 9/11”
September 2011: Airports
March 2012: “Terrorist hacking”
August 2012: Anarchists blowing up bridge during Tampa RNC
September 2012: “Islamic violence over movie”
August 2013: “San Francisco on high alert”
November 2013: “cyber attacks”
April 2014: “College students abroad”
December 2014: ISIS targeting Mississippi River bridge
December 2014: ISIS “sabotaging U.S. military personnel”

over social media

April 2015: ISIS targeting “parts of California”

May 2015: ISIS targeting “military bases”

A casual search reveals the FBI and DHS are a pitiful 0 for 40 warning of terror attacks — some of which were specifically about 4th of July threats, none of which materialized in any way. This should not be considered a comprehensive list of all threat warnings transmitted by media; I tried to narrow the scope to warnings that were at least in some way specific.

The actual terror attacks carried out on U.S. soil — the Times Square bomber, “Underwear bomber,” Boston bombing and Garland attacks — were accompanied by no such warnings. (Nor were the often deadlier terrorist attacks by right-wing white terrorists



– but terrorism in this category is rarely if ever the subject of FBI warnings.)

So why, a rational person may ask, does the media keep repeating them if they are wrong 100 percent of the time?

The problem is three fold:

The FBI has all the incentive in the world to issue warnings and no incentive whatsoever to not issue warnings. Issuing warnings has no downside, while not doing so is all downside.

The FBI, like all agencies of the government, does not operate in a political vacuum. Emphasizing the “ISIS threat” at home necessarily helps prop up the broader war effort the FBI’s boss, the president of the United States, must sell to a war-weary public. The incentive is to therefore highlight the smallest threats. This was a feature that did not go unnoticed during the Bush years, but has since fallen out of fashion.

It has no actual utility. What does it mean to be “more vigilant”? It’s a vague call to alertness that officials, aside from “beefing up security” by local police, never quite explain. If the FBI wanted to tell local police departments to up their security of the 4th of July weekend, surely they could do so quietly, without the chair of the House Committee on Homeland Security having to go on all major networks talking over b-roll of ISIS in apocalyptic terms. [...]

I would call on reporters to ask the government this simple question: “Has the FBI ever successfully warned, or foreshadowed in anyway, a terror attack in the United States? Because so far the count is 0 for 40+, and I am curious what makes this time different.”

Put the burden of proof on those who are attempting to scare us, march our men and women off to war, and line their private security firm’s pockets. Do not demand “FBI warning skeptics” disprove those in power; make those in power justify their own consistently discredited “warnings.”

If journalists still insist on disseminating these vague “threats,” I ask this question: How many false positives would be required for you to eventually stop doing so? Seventy? Two hundred? Because 14 years on, I am curious when, if ever, this will end.

I • Resistance is Duty

school boards and putting in place appointed receivers with broad powers to impose the attacks.

Public control upholding the right of the public to decide is dismissed, when it is most needed. Education demands an increased and expanded decision making role for teachers, students and parents and solutions need that as a starting point.

The states are using these laws, backed up by media disinformation, to try to convince those resisting to concede to the attacks. It is sometimes put, “Now that it is law, we have to accept it and make the best of it.” To further impose such a response, the states are offering bribes and blackmail of various kinds. These give the appearance of “community involvement” and perhaps increased funding for a few schools — but only if the main content of the attack is accepted.

Initiative is to be removed from the hands of those resisting and their efforts to develop their proposals and solutions blocked. People are to be diverted into “improving” whatever “involvement” the laws dictate.

Full funding for all the schools, a main demand of the people is replaced with limited funding for a few. The *state* decides the criteria to receive funding, the amount, etc. Government responsibility to provide full funding for all is replaced with competition among the schools for very insufficient funds.

Those taking up the fight can instead be guided by the stand, *When Injustice is Law, Resistance is Duty* and the program of *Our Schools, We Decide!*

Organized resistance to unjust laws marked the fight against slavery, for women’s rights, against segregation and for civil rights, for immigrant rights, for gay rights — for all the struggles for rights. The laws stood against them and organizing had to go forward based on rejecting them and affirming rights, working out the united actions and tactics for this.

Similarly, the broad *Refuse the Tests!* movement by parents and students — by hundreds of thousands in New York State for example — went against existing law. Parents were told they could not refuse, that they would harm their children and schools. They took the stand that it is their right as parents to defend the rights of their children by refusing and organized to engage all to do the same. Had they not done so, the movement would not exist.

Buffalo Example

The current attack on education in Buffalo is an important example. We reprint below a number of articles concerning state attacks and resistance to them. Resistance has been consistent and growing with the public repeatedly demanding the equal right to education for all. Organizing is such that the program *Our Schools, We Decide!* has begun to take hold and the public is defending it. Work is going forward to implement it in the current conditions, including discussion on what a modern education should look like.

The recent law imposing receivership on 27 schools (almost

half the district) is designed in large part to smash this resistance. It includes bribes for much needed funding — but only for at most three schools — along with what are called “Community Engagement Teams,” or CETs. These serve to engage those concerned about raising the quality of the public schools in implementing receivership.

The irrational argument is given that solving the problems in education can be done by having the appointed state education commissioner hold all powers to decide which of the 27 schools get a receiver and when, and to approve (or change) the actions of the receiver. The receiver then has full powers over budget, curriculum, hiring and firing of teachers, staff and principals, length of school day and year, student discipline, testing, and more, for the particular school or schools. How can such undemocratic dictate serve public education?!

Parents, teachers, staff, students, even the elected school board are to have no powers over these schools, but are to join in imposing the receivership and preoccupy themselves with convincing others to do the same. As well, since the choice of schools and timing for imposing the receiver is completely up to the commissioner, everyone is left anxious and uncertain — and thus more vulnerable to the bribes and blackmail.

The law takes as its starting point that the problem is the teachers, a view widely opposed by parents and students as well as teachers. It is not the public that thinks having the receiver fire all the teachers and staff of the given school will solve any problem. Indeed it imposes far more chaos and undermines the confidence of all involved. Public control is a far better solution and one those organizing in Buffalo will continue to fight for.

At a time when important work is going forward to strengthen the unity of parents, teachers and students in the fight for the equal right to education for all, receivership demands instead that the district, and thus the body politic, be split. Individual contracts for each school under receivership, based on the dictate of the commissioner and receiver, are to be imposed. This serves to decimate the collective strength of teachers, students and parents, organized as part of a single district.

There is no evidence or reasoned argument showing receivership will provide the equal right to education for all. On the contrary, by empowering appointed individuals instead of empowering teachers, staff, parents and students, receivership is guaranteed to increase inequality, competition, instability and uncertainty — all harmful to education.

Those engaged in the struggle are together working out what actions to take to counter receivership now that it is law. Various tactics and social forms will need to be worked out, starting with the pro-active stand *Refuse Receivership! Public Control of Public Schools!* On the agenda is more concentrated organizing for refusal in the schools targeted, forums and teach-ins on receivership and how to fight it, parent and student surveys on what a modern education should look like, and other means to advance the program *Our Schools, We Decide!*

If Receivership is Legitimate, Why the Need for Blackmail?

It is a norm of democratic governance and discourse to engage in reasoned debate and argumentation. A legitimate proposal can be argued out on the basis of its merits, on how it serves to solve a given problem. It is a norm of mafia-style efforts to impose blackmail and bribes. “Do it because I said so, I have the power so you can’t refuse.”

Given this, consider the following facts: New York Governor Cuomo only succeeded in getting the *Education Transformation Act of 2015* passed using blackmail and bribes. The law, which includes receivership of public schools, an unjust teacher assessment regime and other attacks on rights, was widely opposed. Superintendents, principals, teachers, staff, students and parents all across the state opposed it on an organized basis, fully elaborating why receivership was no solution. This reasoned argument of the majority was ignored. Cuomo used the bribe of state funding and the blackmail of withholding it if the law did not pass. It did pass.

More recently, the same bribe and blackmail method was used against the Board of Regents. The law contains \$75 million in funding statewide for “persistently failing schools.” This bribe is used to convince the Regents and community organizations to accept receivership. At their June meeting, the Regents voted

against passing the Commissioner’s Regulations for receivership and expressed reservations about receivership. They were then told that the state would withhold the \$75 million. A second vote was imposed and the regulations passed. If receivership and everything that goes with it, including the “Community Engagement Teams” are solutions, why the need for blackmail and bribes?

It is also the case that it is this same method of bribes and blackmail that was used by the federal government to impose the Common Core testing and assessment regime. Competition among schools was imposed, the federal government decided, and funds were provided only if Common Core was accepted. Most districts then spent far more than they received on a program that has proven itself harmful and anti-education in all respects.

Now the state is using the same bribe and blackmail method and imposing a competition for the \$75 million. The state decides who gets funds, how much and how they are to be spent — not the schools, not the school board. And, as the Regents vote shows, the funds will only be provided if receivership is accepted.

It is important not to be drawn into these mafia-style methods and to instead stand firmly for democracy and rights and our own programs for raising the quality of the Buffalo schools.

Commissioner Decides Contracts for Schools in Receivership

An important part of the education law recently passed in New York concerns the powers of the receiver when it comes to contracts. Now, for the 27 Buffalo schools targeted for receivership, the receiver can require a “receiver agreement,” with each school. This agreement can cover “the length of the school day; the length of the school year; professional development for teachers and administrators; class size; and changes to the programs, assignments, and teaching conditions in the school in receivership.” Professional development and changes to assignments and conditions are not defined so are up to the receiver.

The law then states the following for schools branded “persistently failing:” “The bargaining shall be conducted between the receiver and the collective bargaining unit in good faith and completed not later than **thirty days** from the point at which the receiver requested that the bargaining commence. The agreement shall be **subject to ratification within ten business days by the bargaining unit members in the school**. If the parties are unable to reach an agreement within thirty days or if the agreement is not ratified within ten business days by the bargaining unit members of the school, the parties shall submit any remaining unresolved issues to the **commissioner who shall resolve any unresolved issues within five days**, in accordance with standard collective bargaining principles, (emphasis *VOR*).

In this manner the state has given the Commissioner the power to approve (or disapprove) a given agreement and decide any unresolved issues. Given the long experience with the powers of the Buffalo Control Board to dictate terms, and given the powers now being given to the Commissioner, few doubt these agreements will be contrary to the interests and needs of the students and teachers. The state has also

decided the length of negotiations, something that has long belonged to the local school board and union. It is also dictating to the union how long it can take to ratify a given agreement.

The state is also demanding separate agreements for teachers and staff in each building, thus undermining their collective strength and increasing competition among the teachers and schools. This is especially true given that the receiver starts by firing all the teachers and staff and rehiring those he chooses. Undermining the collective strength of teachers undermines the quality of their teaching conditions and the schools more generally. Separate contracts also serve to undermine collective strength of parents and students, as they are isolated from the district as a whole.

While the receiver is supposed to re-hire 50 percent of those fired, he also sets the criteria for all positions in the school. “The receiver shall have full discretion regarding hiring decisions but must fill at least fifty percent of the newly defined positions with the most senior former school staff who are determined by the staffing committee to be qualified.” The staffing committee is the receiver, his two appointees and two people from the union — meaning the receiver has a majority. Thus he could decide there are not enough qualified teachers to rehire 50 percent.

Further the law states that for those not rehired, they “shall not have any right to bump or displace any other person employed by the district, but shall be placed on a preferred eligibility list.” This is a backhanded way of eliminating senior teachers and staff, especially those rejecting receivership, and eliminating use of seniority district-wide. It is a further example of efforts to weaken the collective strength of the teachers and students.