

Puerto Rico — US colony with history of oppression

Hernandez — life of struggle

Humberto Pagan Hernandez was born in the slums of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, in April 1951. His father (a construction worker) was involved in the violent struggles for independence of the United States colony in 1950. He had been arrested, jailed and sent to a concentration camp.

Humberto grew up in a family that was consciously opposed to American imperialism and capitalism because, as part of the working class and as Puerto Ricans, they lived with its heaviest forms of oppression. Both his parents now belong to the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.

Humberto tells of a cousin of his father murdered by police in 1934 for his activities as an independendiste and a cousin of his mother's jailed during the 1950 rebellion and not released until 1969.

It was during the Dominican Republic revolt of 1965, says Humberto, "when I really realized that we had to struggle for independence. Puerto Rico was being used by the U.S. as a counter-revolutionary base against Latin American nations — our own brothers."

In 1967 while still in high school he actively joined the independence movement. In 1968 at the University of Puerto Rico he became part of the Federation of University Students for Independence. He was arrested at this time while postering and charged with damaging public property. The charges were later dropped.

The university has become the centre of the independendiste movement and the police were particularly wary of any trouble there. On several occasions students died from police bullets, and dozens more have been wounded. Humberto himself was arrested seven or eight times more with more than twenty charges resulting from political activity. Twice he was beaten.

In 1969 he was elected to the Student Council at the university and to the Central Committee of the Federation of Students. In his home town of Aguadilla he became a director of an area independence organization. In 1970, during

the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, he participated in a demonstration at the Ramey atomic base protesting the presence of the U.S. military in Puerto Rico. American military bases occupy 13% of the territory of Puerto Rico and two of them are atomic.

When he attempted to stop the beating of picketers thrown on the base by an FBI agent, "they beat my head again." On October 11, 1970 young independendiste Julio Roldan, arrested and jailed in New York, was found dead in his cell, a victim of "racist police brutality". There were massive protests in Roldan's home town (also Aguadilla) where he was brought for burial. The tragedy deeply affected Humberto, then 18.

On March 11, 1971, a battle between police and students broke out on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan. Such clashes had occurred frequently over the last couple of years, sparked by the induction of Puerto Rican youths into the U.S. Army, the presence of a Regular Officers Training Corps (ROTC) squadron on the campus, and the growing sentiment in favor of independence from the American Empire.

Bullets flew, but according to a study made by Puerto Rican sociologist Dr. Luis Falcon, now with the University of New York, they came from only two sources: the police and the ROTC. In the pandemonium, two police officers and one ROTC student were killed. One of the policemen was Lt. Colonel Juan Mercado, the chief of the Puerto Rican riot squad.

A week after the riot in the retaliatory police roundup, Humberto says; "I was at home with my parents when two police agents I recognized burst inside. They beat up my family. With no warrant they took my father away and arrested my friends for being in my home — but they were released after interrogation — and you know what interrogation means in Puerto Rico."

Pagan was charged with the murder of Mercado after being beaten and tortured when he refused to turn state's evidence in return for his freedom, then released on bail. Late in August he left Puerto Rico for New York. He was looked after by draft assistance people until he entered Canada last September.

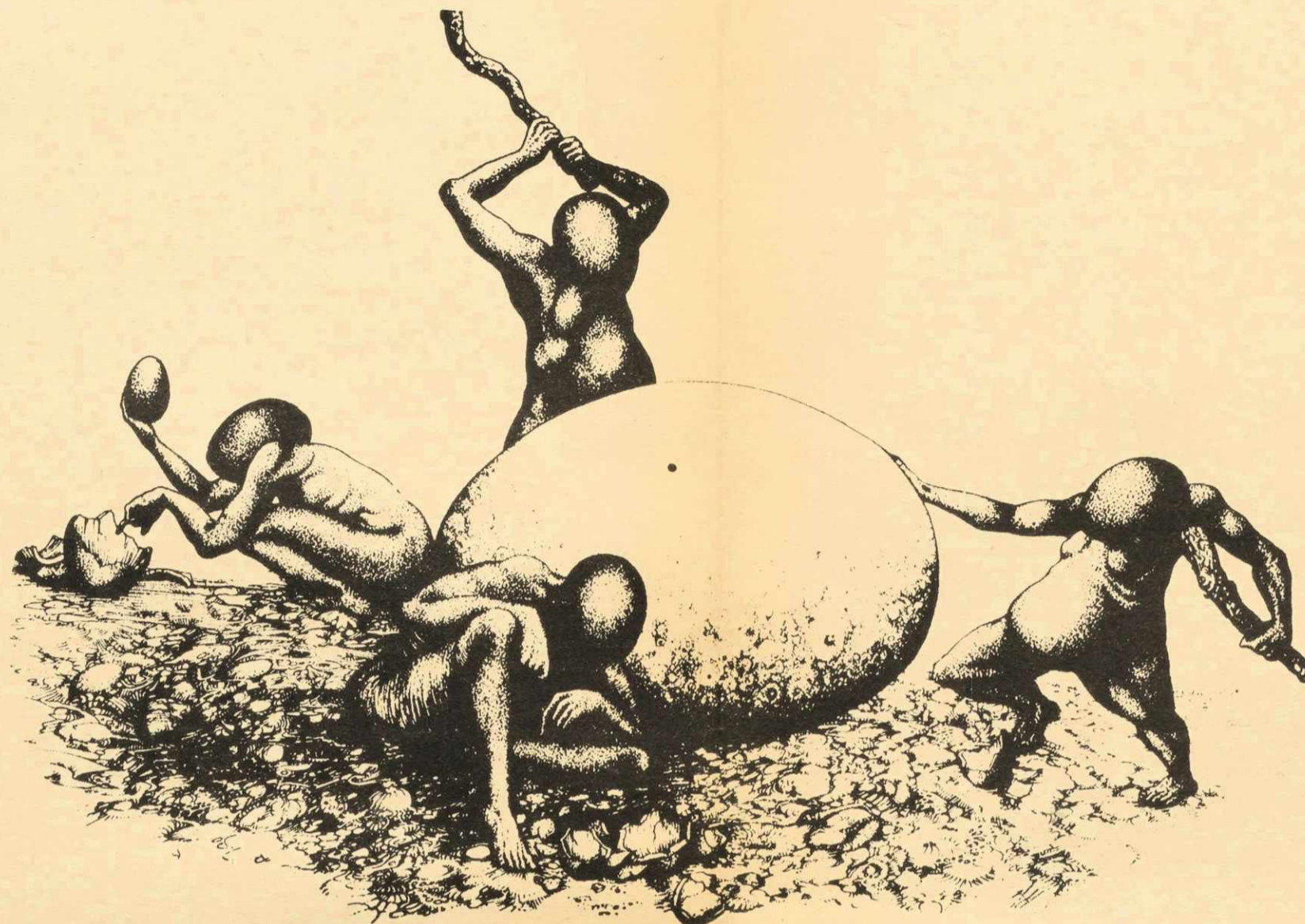
During his time in Ottawa he was followed by the RCMP until he was arrested and incarcerated in the Carleton County Jail on September 30 for entering the country illegally. He has remained in jail since then.

Colonial situation analyzed

by Humberto Pagan Hernandez

Puerto Rico is a Latin American nation located in the Caribbean, 500 miles from the South American continent. Its population is 4,500,000 of which 1,500,000 (31% of the population) are exiled in the ghettos of New York and other American cities. The deepest root of the problem (Puerto Rico is the only nation in the world with one third of its population living outside its borders) is that Puerto Rico is a colony of the U.S.

This means that Puerto Rico is a nation in which



imperialism has intervened militarily, economically, politically, socially and culturally.

The problem for Puerto Rico now is the survival or the extinction on one hand; or on the other, the liberation or slavery of the workers of the country who, in practical terms, constitute 90% of the Puerto Rican population.

1) POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS:

Puerto Rico has lost its economic base. On the invasion by the American Army and the conversion of the nation into a colony of the U.S. the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie betrayed the people and stood with imperialism. America, being more powerful than this bourgeoisie, absorbed the country economically. (The American monopolies actually control 87.5% of the Puerto Rican economy).

This has converted Puerto Rico into a nation and people exploited in the extreme. The U.S. has created in this country a system of colonial capitalist exploitation which shows very profitable results for the Yankee monopolies, but which has converted Puerto Rico into one of the poorest nations in the world. The colonial exploitation of Puerto Rico is exercised in the following ways:

1) Military and political control directly from Washington (13% of the total territory of Puerto Rico is occupied by American bases — two of them atomic, Amey AFB and Roosevelt Road Naval and AFB). This is 13% of the national territory which was occupied by the American government without paying one cent to the Puerto Ricans. As well, all the laws applicable to the Puerto Ricans are laws imposed by the U.S. government.

2) Control of all means of communication (radio, TV, press, etc.) by government and Yankee monopolies.

3) The exploitation of the natural resources of the country including mineral beds (copper, tungsten, nickel, gold, manganese, etc.) and the land.

4) The exploitation of the Puerto Rican workers.

5) The monopoly control of the economy — the means of production and the distribution of wealth.

6) The application of "special laws" which provide favourable conditions for American investors. (American factories don't pay taxes in Puerto Rico, nor do they pay for light, water, etc.)

These and other conditions have caused the Puerto Rican people the following maladies:

i) total destruction of the country's agriculture, obliging Puerto Ricans to buy all their basic

groceries from the U.S.

ii) accelerated inflation — the cost of living is 25% higher than in Canada or the U.S. but the salaries are two times lower.

iii) Deficit in the trade balance in the order of \$1,235,000,000 in favour of the American monopolies — but against Puerto Rico.

iv) A greatly increased level of poverty. The annual per capita income in Puerto Rico is in the order of \$500 for 74% of the population; for 25% of the population it is \$100. This means that if we use the levels of poverty established in the U.S., 90% of the Puerto Rican population lives in extreme poverty.

v) A very unequal distribution of wealth. In Puerto Rico, eight per cent of the population receives 51% of the national income, while 25% of the population receives 2.9 per cent and 67.3% receives 48%.

Therefore 92% of the population receives 49 per cent of the national income, while 8 per cent receives 51% of it.

vi) Chronic unemployment — 31% of the working class is unemployed. From 1,073,000 employable there are 320,000 unemployed, and 35.2% of the workers underemployed.

vii) Lack of housing and medical services — 35% of the population lives in slums. Just outside the capital there is one doctor for every 1300 inhabitants, one half of the doctors are private, and there are towns and villages without either doctor or pharmacist. A great proportion of deaths occur to people suffering from curable ailments.

WHILE THE POPULATION SUFFERS THIS EXPLOITATION, the American monopolies extract from Puerto Rico billions of dollars in annual profits. The national debt further increases the outflow of capital to the U.S. This means that while the people of Puerto Rico are dying of hunger, the American capitalists are stealing all the riches of the nation. On the other hand, the colonial education which the U.S. supports is so alienated and unequal that 17% of the people are illiterate. The English language is the compulsory idiom of the schools, despite the fact that the mother tongue of Puerto Ricans is Spanish. The Puerto Ricans are compelled to give allegiance to the American flag and serve in the American army, yet they are not accorded the basic human dignities an American citizen expects.

PUERTO RICO HAS ONE OF THE GREATEST HISTORIES of suffering and heroism in the Americas. In order to understand completely the

situation in the country we should know the historical roots of the fight for independence by her people. The people of Puerto Rico count more than a century of struggle for freedom, first against the Spanish Imperium and now against American imperialism.

HISTORY

After 375 years of Spanish colonialism, and various insurrections for independence, the Puerto Rican people stood in arms on Sept. 23, 1868 and established the Republic of Puerto Rico. Spanish troops answered with blood and violence. After many battles, the Puerto Rican patriots were defeated by the Spanish colonialists. The fight of the people continued. In 1897 Spain was forced to recognize Puerto Rico as an autonomous nation.

Almost immediately (1898) Puerto Rico was invaded by the American army during the Spanish American War. In spite of the great resistance of the patriots fighting in city and mountains, the troops imposed their way and Puerto Rico became a colony of the U.S. The first action performed by the Americans was to destroy the national government and to derogate all the liberties enjoyed by the Puerto Ricans — liberties won by blood and great sacrifice. The Americans imposed military government under General Miles.

In 1917 the U.S. government imposed on the Puerto Rican people compulsory military service and American citizenship. This produced large protest movements.

IN 1934 A GENERAL STRIKE OF WORKERS and peasants took place — commanded by a martyr and hero of the Puerto Rican people: Don Pedro Albizu Campos.

The colonial police commanded by Colonel Riggs took harsh measures: hideous massacres took place at Rio Piedras (four dead and hundreds wounded) and political prisoners were murdered. The end of that year's repression left hundreds of Puerto Ricans in jail or dead. In 1937 during one of the May independence demonstrations, the police fired with grapeshot on the people, murdering twenty-one and leaving more than 200 wounded. All the independence leaders were jailed.

On Oct. 30, the people of Puerto Rico stood in arms and proclaimed the Republic of Puerto Rico for the second time. The American government sent 26,000 soldiers plus police to stamp out the rebellion. For many weeks there were battles throughout the country. The American Air Force used their planes to strafe and bomb occupied Puerto Rican cities.

More than 10,000 people were sent to concentration camps, dead and wounded were counted by the thousands, Yankee Army had crushed the rebellion.

In 1954 the Puerto Rican patriots attacked the House of Congress of the United States wounding 17 congressmen with gunfire. This to protest the repression and subjugation under which the people were held by the Yankee government.

IN 1965, DON PEDRO CAMPOS WAS ASSASSINATED in prison. This produced great demonstrations throughout the country. The fight for independence continued. In 1967 the colonial police opened fire against a student-worker demonstration in the capital, killing one worker and wounding. The same year, another student leader, Rafael Verona was assassinated by the Yankee army.

In 1968 the extreme right achieved political power. The government took off its "liberal" mask and began a savage repression. That year the underground revolutionary army was organized in Puerto Rico. In 1969 the country was convulsed by large worker-patriot demonstrations.

1) The students burned ROTC offices
2) Campaigns against compulsory military service were organized and more than 18,000 refused induction into the U.S. army.

This same year the CIA and the government organized a group of clandestine fascists known as "los Vigilantes". They were dedicated to attack and attempt to assassinate Independendista leaders and to destroy the property of Puerto Rican patriots with explosives and incendiary bombs. The revolutionaries replied to these terrorist actions by attacking the huge American monopolies and military bases.

IN THIS SAME YEAR THE REPRESSION INTENSIFIED. During a student demonstration the police opened fire on students leaving one dead and about 85 wounded. Julio Roldea (a patriot) was murdered in jail by the Yankee police. The government ordered a massive jailing of Independendistas. A great part of the revolutionary patriots were underground then. The press in Puerto Rico celebrated this repression as a triumph.

1971

A GRAVE CRISIS BEGAN. By military action the underground revolutionaries inflicted losses in excess of \$50 million on American companies. On

March 11 students and workers were confronted by the colonial police and ROTC cadets of the Yankee army. Sixty-one patriots were wounded as were 24 police and cadets; two police and one cadet were killed during the battle. The terrorists of the right (vigilantes) attacked and destroyed the homes of thousands of patriots.

They blew up the offices of the patriotic organizations across the country. The socialist leaders went to the United Nations to denounce this terrorism initiated by the colonial government. Hundreds of patriots were in jails.

The crisis continues to intensify. At the moment this article is being written the Puerto Rican workers have paralyzed the communication, transport, and port systems. The clandestine revolutionary groups continue to fight against the colonial government. The right terrorists attempted to assassinate the socialist leaders of the country. For 1972 it is expected that the repression of the patriots will be extremely severe (because the independendista Puerto Rican Party is prepared to join other patriotic groups in the country to contest the elections — using these elections as another front).

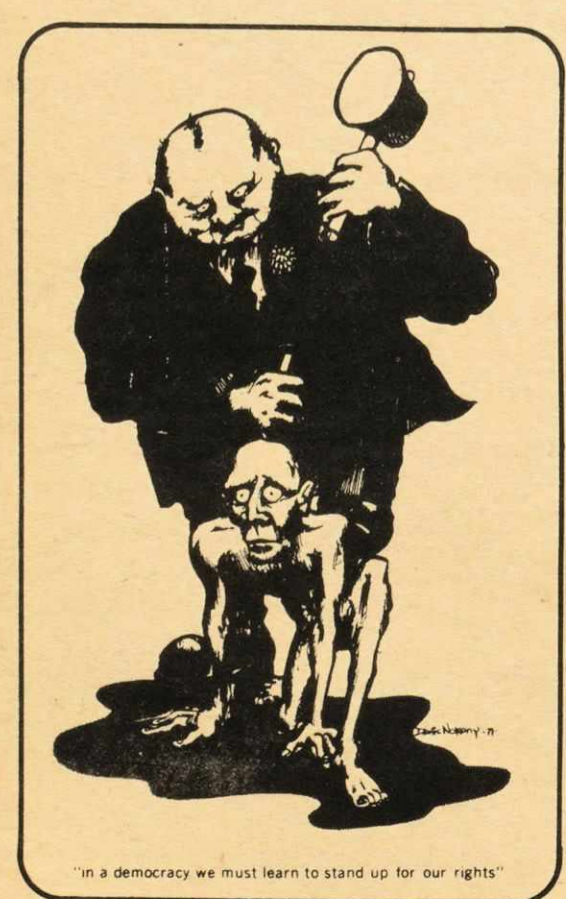
Meanwhile, the workers and patriots of Puerto Rico are prepared to continue their day-to-day fight for the independence and liberation of Puerto Rico.

The people and workers have fought a long and heroic battle for their liberation. They know that their fight is not only the fight of their nationality but the fight of the exploited classes against the exploiter.

THE AMERICAN RULING CLASS and their Puerto Rican agents have installed in this country a fascist colonial government. The conditions of exploitation have produced a high level of misery, the American military occupation of Puerto Rico chronic unemployment, illiteracy, theft of the human and natural resources of the country, fascism, etc. All these ills are inherent in the colonial capitalist system which for 3/4 of a century has kept the workers and people of Puerto Rico under American imperialism.

The people have risen to demand their liberation and they will not stop until Puerto Rico becomes an independent socialist republic.

WE APPEAL TO THE HONOUR AND DIGNITY of the government and people of Canada to understand the colonial situation of Puerto Rico and the struggle for the liberation of its people.



"In a democracy we must learn to stand up for our rights"

