

Here's an inside view from behind the tourist glamor of Puerto Rico



This is how Puerto Rico is sold to tourists — but the nation is one of the poorest in the world



When the Spanish were driven out the U.S. moved in

By HUMBERTO PAGAN HERNANDEZ
 Humberto Pagan Hernandez is a leading figure in the Puerto Rican Independence struggle and is now undergoing a deportation hearing in Ottawa which may mean he will be sent back to Puerto Rico — where he will surely be killed. This is a summary of the conditions and history of Puerto Rico which was written in a letter to the Ottawa underground paper, the *Usually Reliable Source* — the only way it could be sent out of jail. He was not allowed any books on the subject so all statistics are from memory.

The scene now
 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 percent 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 of its borders) is that Puerto Rico is a colony of the U.S.
 This means Puerto Rico is a nation where imperialism has intervened militarily, economically, politically, socially and culturally.
 The problem for Puerto Rico now is the survival and liberation of the workers which constitute 90 percent of the Puerto Rican population.
 Puerto Rico has lost its economic base. The invading U.S. army turned the nation into a U.S. colony when Puerto Rican bourgeoisie betrayed the people and backed the imperialists. The U.S. then absorbed this bourgeoisie, the rest of the country economically. (The U.S. monopolies actually control 87.5 percent of the Puerto Rican economy).
 This has converted Puerto Rico into a nation exploited in the extreme. The U.S. has created a system of colonial capitalist exploitation which shows profitable results for the monopolies but 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) Direct military and political control from Washington (13 percent of Puerto Rico is occupied by American bases — two of them atomic, Ramsey Air Force Base and Roosevelt Road Naval and Air Force Base). This territory was occupied by the U.S. government without paying one cent to the Puerto Ricans. As well, all the laws applied to Puerto Rico are imposed by the U.S. government.
 2) Control of all communication (radio, tv, press, etc.) by government and U.S. monopolies.
 3) The exploitation of natural resources (copper, tungsten, nickel, gold, manganese, etc.) and the land.
 4) The exploitation of workers.
 5) The monopoly control of the economy — production and distribution of the wealth.
 6) Special laws which provide favorable conditions for investors. (American factories for example, don't pay taxes nor do they pay for light, water, etc.).

And the results
 These conditions and others have caused the Puerto Rican people the following maladies:
 i) Total destruction of agriculture, obliging Puerto Ricans to buy all their foodstuffs from the U.S.
 ii) Accelerated inflation: The cost of living is 25 percent higher than in Canada or the U.S. but the salaries two times lower.
 iii) Deficit in the trade balance of \$1,235,000,000 in favor of U.S. monopolies.
 iv) A greatly increased level of poverty: the annual per capita income in Puerto Rico is \$500 for 74 percent of the population and for 25 percent, it is \$100. Under U.S. poverty levels, 90 percent live in extreme poverty.
 v) A very unequal distribution of wealth: eight percent of the population receives 51 percent of the national income while 25 percent receives 2.9 percent and 67.3 percent receives 48 percent. Therefore 92 percent of the population receive 49 percent of the national income while 8 percent receives 51 percent of it.
 vi) Chronic unemployment: 31 percent of the working class is unemployed. From 1,073,000 employables, there are 320,000 unemployed and 35.2 percent of the workers are underemployed.
 vii) Lack of housing and medical services: 35 percent of the population lives in slums. Just outside San Juan there is one doctor for every 1,300 inhabitants and one half of these doctors are private. For the entire country only 12,000 hospital beds are available, one bed for each 250 inhabitants. Forty-five percent of the hospitals are private and there are towns and villages without a doctor or pharmacist. A great proportion of deaths occur to

people suffering from curable ailments.
 While the population suffers the U.S. monopolies extract billions of dollars in profits annually. The national debt further increases the outflow of capital to the U.S.
 This means that while people are dying of hunger, the U.S. capitalists are stealing all the riches of the nation. The colonial education which the U.S. supports is so unequal that 17 percent of the people are illiterate. English is the compulsory idiom in the schools despite the fact that the mother tongue of the Puerto Ricans is Spanish. The Puerto Ricans must give allegiance to the American flag and serve in America's armies 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. The people of Puerto Rico account for more than 100 years of struggle for freedom first against the Spanish Imperium and now against American imperialism.

A general history
 After 375 years of Spanish colonialism and various insurrections for independence, the Puerto Rican people rebelled on Sept. 23, 1868 and established the Republic of Puerto Rico. The Spanish troops answered with blood and violence. The Puerto Rican patriots were defeated by the Spanish colonialists. The fight of the people continued and in 1897 Spain was forced to recognize Puerto Rico as an autonomous nation.
 Puerto Rico was invaded in 1898 by the American Army the Spanish-American War. In spite of the great resistance of the patriots fighting in city and mountain, the troops imposed their way and Puerto Rico became a U.S. colony. The first action performed by the Americans was to destroy the national government and to derogate all the liberties enjoyed by the Puerto Ricans and impose military government under General Miles.

In 1917 the U.S. government imposed compulsory military service and U.S. 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: massacres took place at Rio Piedras (four dead and hundreds wounded) and political prisoners were murdered. The end of that repression left hundreds of Puerto Ricans in jail or dead. In 1937 in one of the many independence demonstrations, the police fired with grapeshot on the people killing 21 and leaving more than 200 wounded. All the Independentista leaders were jailed.

On Oct. 30, the people stood in arms and proclaimed the Republic of Puerto Rico for the second time. The U.S. government sent 26,000 soldiers and police to stamp out the rebellion. For weeks there were battles throughout the country. The U.S. Air Force used their planes to strafe and bomb the occupied Puerto Rican cities. More than 10,000 people were sent to concentration camps, dead and wounded were counted by the thousands. The U.S. Army had crushed the rebellion. In 1954 the Puerto Rican patriots attacked the U.S. Houses of Congress wounding 17 congressmen with gunfire. This was to protest the repression by the U.S. government.

In 1965 Don Pedro Campos was assassinated in prison and this produced demonstrations. 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 about 80 people. The same year another student leader, Rafael Varona was assassinated by the U.S. 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 (Regular Officer Training Corps - U.S. Army) offices. 2) Campaigns of resistance 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 (through the police) organized a group of clandestine fascists known as "Los Vigilantes". They were dedicated to assassinate Independentista leaders and to destroy the property of Puerto Rican patriots. The revolutionaries replied

to these terrorist actions by attacking the huge American monopolies and military bases.

The repression intensified. In a student demonstration the police opened fire on the students leaving one dead and about 85 wounded. Shortly after, Julio Roldea (a patriot) was murdered in jail by the U.S. police. The government ordered a massive jailing of "Independentistas". A great part of the revolutionary patriots went underground then. The press in Puerto Rico celebrated this repression as a triumph.

And in 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 U.S. ROTC cadets. 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 patriotic organizations throughout the country. The socialist leaders went to the United Nations to denounce this terrorism

A profile Just what makes a revolutionary?

(CUP) — 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 U.S. colony in 1950. He had been arrested, jailed, and sent to a concentration camp.

Hernandez grew up in a family that was opposed to U.S. imperialism and the capitalist system because — as part of the working class, they lived with its heaviest forms of oppression. Both his parents now belong to the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.

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

It was in 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 United States 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 first arrested at this time while posterizing and charged with damage to public property. The charges were later dropped.

The UPR has become a centre of the independentist movement and the police were particularly wary of any trouble there. On several occasions students died from police bullets and dozens more wounded. Hernandez was arrested seven or eight times more, with more than 20 charges resulting from political activity. Twice he was beaten.

In 1969 he was elected to the UPR student council and to the Central committee of the Federation of Students. In his hometown of Aguadilla, he became a director of an area independence organization.

In the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic of 1970 he participated in a demonstration at the Ramey atomic base protesting the presence of the U.S. military in Puerto Rico.

When he tried to stop the beating of a picketer thrown onto the base by an FBI agent, says Humberto, "They broke my head again."

On Oct. 11, 1970, young independentist Julio Roldan, arrested and jailed in New York, was found dead in his cell. There were massive protests in Roldan's hometown, also Aguadilla, where he was

initiated by the colonial government. Hundreds of patriots were in jails.

The crisis continues to intensify. At this moment the workers have paralyzed the communication, transport and port systems. The government increased repression throughout the country. 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 independentista Puerto Rican Party is prepared to join with other patriotic groups in the country to contest the elections — using them as another front.)

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

The conditions of exploitation have produced a high level of misery, the U.S. military occupation of Puerto Rico, chronic unemployment (31 percent), illiteracy, political repression, theft of the human and natural resources of the country, fascism, etc. All these ills are inherent in the colonial capitalist system which for most of the century, has kept the workers and people of Puerto Rico under U.S. imperialism.

brought for burial. The victim of police brutality deeply affected Hernandez then 18.

A battle between police and students broke out March 11, 1971 on the San Juan UPR campus. 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 U.S. empire.

Bullets flew, but Puerto Rican sociologist Luis Falcon now with the University of New York, says 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. Col. Juan Mercado, the chief of the Puerto Rican riot squad.

A week later Hernandez says: "I was at home with my parents when two (police) agents I recognized, burst inside. They beat my family up. 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."

Hernandez 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.

When in Ottawa he was followed by the RCMP until he was arrested and placed in the Carleton County Jail on Sept. 30 after entering the country illegally. He has remained in jail ever since.

Letters and articles he has written as well as poems (Hernandez is also a liberation poet) have been opened or not delivered. All his mail is given first to jail personnel. Much of it has never arrived at its destination. He is allowed one book at a time but has difficulty finding the material he would like to read.

Hernandez was visited in the Carleton County Jail by agents he feels were either CIA or FBI, who questioned him about the state of the independence movement and its supposed links with Cuba. They showed him pictures of Chinese, Cuban and Soviet ambassadorial staff to see if he recognized them. In their paranoia, he grinned, they suspected him at 20 of being "a master espionage agent" co-ordinating underground movements in Puerto Rico, New York, and Canada.