

Election tests Puerto Rico Independistas

by Ronnie Lavler

San Juan, Puerto Rico (PNS) — When the polls close and the votes are counted here in November, this long-time U.S. commonwealth — and tax haven for U.S. industry — could find itself the focus of U.S. fears over a growing leftward tilt in the Caribbean.

For the first time, both of the island's pro-independence parties — the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) — have gubernatorial and legislative candidates on the ballot. Gaining momentum from the collapse of the mainland-dominated economy, they are expected to double, triple or quadruple the PIP's four per cent showing of 1972.

If they do garner 15 per cent or more, the independence movement will have a new stamp of legitimacy on the island. Already, according to a State Department official, that prospect is beginning to worry official Washington.

At the international level, a good showing by the "independistas" will likely fuel Third World attempts at the United Nations to pressure the U.S. into granting Puerto Rico independence.

The U.N. Decolonization Committee and the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations have both passed pro-independence resolutions. But the U.S., arguing that any U.N. discussion of Puerto Rico is "an undue intervention in its internal affairs," has been able to bottle the matter up in committee — threatening to withhold economic aid to those countries voting to bring it to the General Assembly floor.

The Decolonization Committee, however, has pledged to make specific recommendations on Puerto Rico's case next August.

Statehood Also an Option

Overall electoral victory in November will go to one of the two dominant parties on the island — the ruling Popular Democratic Party (PDP) or its largest challenger, the New Progressive Party (NPP). But even for these politically moderate parties, the island's status vis a vis the U.S. has emerged as a hotly contested issue — as a result of a "new compact of permanent union" now pending before the U.S. Congress.

The Popular Democrats favor the new compact, largely for economic reasons. By transferring authority over many economic, immigration and environmental matters from Washington to the government of Puerto Rico, the compact would allow the island to attract more business by offering lower wages and relaxing environmental and job safety standards.

The Progressives join the independistas in condemning the new compact for stripping away the protection provided Puerto Rican workers by federal legislation. In the long term, the Progressives favor statehood for the island.

Both independence parties condemn the compact as a ruse to cover up what they describe as the continuing colonial status of the island. Socialist candidate Juan Mari Bras told a U.S. congressional committee, "The obligation of Congress

in relation to Puerto Rico is simple: to renounce without condition or reservation its authority over the Puerto Rican people — which we never gave them; to dismantle the bureaucratic, repressive and military apparatus set up by the U.S. to safeguard its domination over the island; and to respect the right of the people to self-determination and independence."

The gubernatorial candidates of all four parties have taken part in three televised debates, and the island's newspapers have shown new respect for the independistas, publishing lengthy interviews with Socialist candidate Juan Mari Bras and his Independence Party counterpart, Ruben Berrios Martinez.

Even such groups as the Lions Club, Rotary Club and League of Women Voters have invited the pro-independence candidates to participate in their television programs and address their meetings.

Independistas divided

The existence of two pro-independence parties is a reflection of the ideological split in the movement. Mari Bras has called on his "fellow patriots in the PIP to form a united front," but Berrios, who disavows the radical politics of the Socialists, has rejected the invitation.

The Independence Party supporters come mainly from Puerto Rico's middle class. They favor the establishment of a more egalitarian society in the manner of Portuguese Prime Minister Mario Soares' Socialist Party and oppose the more radical line of the Socialists, which would transform Puerto Rico into a socialist society patterned after Cuba.

The Independence Party also hopes to win votes from nationalist Popular Democratic supporters who are disenchanted by their party's increased dependence on the U.S. government, mainly through federal funds.

The Socialists, on the other hand, expect to draw the bulk of their electoral support from the labor and student movements. Its members are active in what is known here as the "new union movement," a drive to break away from mainland-based internationals — believed by many to have sold out to management — and set up local, independent unions.

The Socialist also have affiliated student organizations at the high school and university level and enjoy a good measure of support among island intellectuals.

During the campaign, the local government admitted it has used undercover agents to infiltrate the Socialist Party, defending its actions as an offensive against the Socialists' endorsement of revolution and armed struggle as potential means to achieve independence.

And Puerto Rico's Electoral Court, a quasi-judicial entity that oversees the election process, exempted the Socialists from having to reveal the names of its campaign contributors after it determined that party members were subject to "harassment by repressive agencies," defined by the court as commonwealth police and the FBI.

Broken Bootstrap

The Puerto Rico controversy dates back 78 years to the Spanish-American War, when the U.S. invaded the island. U.S. citizenship was extended to Puerto Ricans in 1917, allowing them to travel to the U.S. at will and obligating them to fight in American wars.

The establishment of the Commonwealth in 1952, which permitted the U.S. to remove Puerto Rico from the U.N. colony list, coincided with the development of Operation Bootstrap, now the backbone of the island's economy. The philosophy of the Bootstrap, then as now, was to attract U.S. industry to the island with cheap labor and tax exemptions.

But when the recession hit three years ago, the bootstrap broke. U.S. companies began to pack off to countries with lower wage scales and unemployment shot up — to 21 per cent in government statistics, 30 percent according to Governor Hernandez Colon and 40 per cent by many independent estimates.

The collapse in turn lit a fire under the independence movement, demonstrating the dangers of dependence on mainland industries which it had pointed out for years.

Mainland-based corporations own 81 per cent of the plants and industries here and control 85 per cent of all commercial sales, virtually the entire mass communications industry and 60 per cent of all housing and banking. In the last fiscal year alone, these companies have realized a profit of \$1.3 billion on the island.

The U.S. military occupies 10 per cent of the island's territory, much of which was once productive farmland.

Meanwhile, 60 per cent of the population still lives below the poverty level and 71 per cent of the people receive food stamps. Thirteen percent are illiterate, while more than half have less than a fourth grade education.

The poor are crowded into barrios as dense as any in the world, shantytowns usually lacking running water, sewage and garbage disposal. Even where there is running water, purification systems are often inadequate, as demonstrated by a massive case of gastroenteritis that hit 7,000 residents of a mountaintop town this summer.

It is these conditions that provide fertile ground for the independistas. If they are not changed, Puerto Rico could well become the kind of explosive issue that Panama is today.

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Register and vote. It could mean the difference between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford.

“Too many have had to suffer at the hands of a political and economic elite who have shaped decisions and never had to account for mistakes nor to suffer from injustice. When unemployment prevails, they never stand in line looking for a job. When deprivation results from a confused welfare system, they never do without food or clothing or a place to sleep. When the public schools are inferior or torn by strife, their children go to exclusive private schools.”

Jimmy Carter made that statement when he accepted the Democratic nomination for President. If it hadn't been for Black support, Jimmy Carter would never have gotten that far.

For it was Blacks who put Jimmy Carter over the top in the Democratic primaries. Because he understands our needs. And because he'll do something about a government that ignores them.

Now we have a chance to make a difference again. In the general election November 2nd. It can mean the difference between politics as usual or real leadership for a change.

We can drift along with an economy that's choking the working people of this country. Or we can elect Jimmy Carter — a leader who will check inflation and put America back to work again.

We can continue with a lack of justice in this country. Or we can elect Jimmy Carter



— a leader who doesn't think big shot crooks should go free while the poor ones go to jail.

We can suffer through a welfare system that's bloated and confused. Or we can elect Jimmy Carter — a leader who will straighten out the welfare system and make it fair.

We can struggle

with a government that does nothing to help the cities. Or we can elect Jimmy Carter — a leader who will move to relieve an unemployment rate among Blacks that approaches 17%. We can continue to have a government that caters to the special interests, the powerful and the privileged. Or we can have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. A government led by Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale.

It can't happen without your help. That's why it's so important for you to register. And to vote Democratic.

Vote for Jimmy Carter A leader, for a change.

Paid for and authorized by 1976 Democratic Presidential Campaign Committee, Inc.

Caldwell joins RSVP board

Gerald A. Caldwell, Manager of the Medical Center Branch of the First National Bank, was recently appointed to a 2 year term on the Retired Senior Volunteer Program.

R.S.V.P. specializes in placing retired persons in volunteer positions around the community and helps prevent a valuable part of our community from becoming inactive.

Caldwell, who is very involved in community activities (he is Deputy

District Governor for District 36-0 of Lions International and Chairman of the St. Vincent De Paul Day Care Center), states, "I am looking forward to working with R.S.V.P. I feel it has great potential for keeping older Portlanders an active useful part of our community."

Also named to the board were Paul Eckleman, Irving All and Phillip Bogue. All terms are for two years.

(R.S.V.P. is a non-profit program). For further information contact Morgan Dickerson at 248-4288.

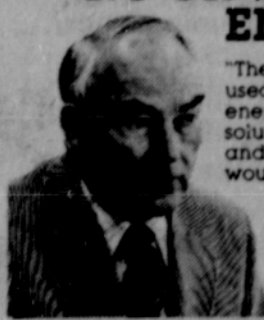
Ministers oppose 10, 12

The Legislative Committee of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon announced its opposition to State Ballot Measures #10 and #12.

"We believe that natural resources cannot be replaced, once destroyed. Stewardship for succeeding generations

is part of our responsibility today. We feel that maintaining the present process of statewide and regional land use planning is progress in the right direction and we therefore strongly oppose State Ballot Measure #10 and #12."

"PREVENT WASTE OF NEEDED NATURAL RESOURCES. VOTE NO ON #9—THE NUCLEAR ENERGY BAN"



HOLLIS DOLE
Former Oregon State Geologist and Assistant Secretary of the Interior—Mineral Resources

DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE CONFUSION VOTE #9 NO IT BANS NUCLEAR ENERGY

OREGONIANS AGAINST THE BAN ON NUCLEAR ENERGY • 520 S W 6TH AVE PORTLAND ORE 97204 • HARRY BAGSDALE TREAS



JIM REDDEN

On the occasion of the removal of boards from the Lampus windows: Jim Redden, A. L. Henderson, Harold Williams, Angelo Lampus and Stephen Kafoury.

Jim REDDEN

Democrat for Attorney General