

PUERTO RICO SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE HOLDS THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE

On the week-end of July 27, 28, and 29, 1979, the Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee (PRSC) held its third bi-annual conference in New York City. Preparations for this conference began in earnest in late June with discussion throughout the organization of several key political and organizational reports and position papers revolving around the major questions facing the PRSC.

The three days of discussion and debate were attended by more than 120 people representing the 10 local chapters of the PRSC across the country, members of the National Board and a host of observers and invited guests. Observers included representatives from the Venceremos Brigade and Non-Intervention in Chile (NICH), and from political organizations in the U.S. such as the U.S. Zone of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the National Network of Marxist Leninist Clubs, M.I.N.P.-El Comite and others. In addition, there were observers from political organizations in Puerto Rico, such as the Popular Socialist Movement (MSP) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR-ML). The closing session was addressed by Eneida Vazquez from the Puerto Rican Peace Council, Luis Lausell of the Electrical Workers union (UTIER) in Puerto Rico, and a representative of the Vieques Fishermen's Association. The warmest welcome and a standing ovation was extended to the Washington-based representative of the New Provisional Government of Nicaragua who spoke to express the solidarity of the Provisional Government, the FSLN, and the people of Nicaragua with the struggle for Puerto Rican independence.

The conference opened Friday night with the introduction of the reports and documents previously distributed and

discussed by the local chapters. The reports included two positions within the organization on the question of Puerto Rico's status, a political evaluation of the PRSC since its last national conference, a report evaluating the present structure of the PRSC and proposing certain changes, and finally, the proposed work plan for the next two years. The purpose of these papers was to give form and focus to the key areas of discussion and struggle which the organization had to take up in the course of the three-day conference. The political struggle and the resulting unity would help to place the PRSC on a firmer footing as a national anti-imperialist organization in solidarity with Puerto Rico, one better able to grapple with the tasks which lay ahead.

The final task of the conference was the election of a new national leadership body which would be responsible for implementing the agreements of the conference.

The National Board also had the responsibility to provide the political and organizational leadership until the next national conference in the spring of 1981.

PUERTO RICO TODAY— THE STRUGGLE AROUND STATUS

The main question debated at the conference was how to characterize the present political reality in Puerto Rico. As we stated in our last two editorials in *Obreros En Marcha*, this assessment was needed to provide the framework for the tasks necessary to be taken up in the coming period. In addition, an assessment of current U.S. reality was needed to determine which tasks of solidarity would be possible (see *OEM* Vol. IV June and July).

Discussion at the conference centered on the portion of the political report which addressed Puerto Rico's reality and the ques-



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tion of status. Preparatory documents and debates among the 7-member interim leadership of the PRSC (composed of individuals from the Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee [PWOC], the Puerto Rican Socialist Party [PSP], M.I.N.P.-El Comite, and the coordinators of the chapters in Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Washington, D.C.) had given rise to clear disagreement on the status issue and the analysis of present political conditions in Puerto Rico. In a 4 to 3 decision the interim committee voted that statehood was the main danger facing Puerto Rico; but a

majority and minority position on this question was recognized. The Majority position was held by PWOC, PSP, and the coordinators of Boston and Philadelphia; the Minority position was held by MINP-El Comité, and the coordinators of Washington and New York.

The majority position held that U.S. imperialism had opted for statehood as the solution to Puerto Rico's present economic and political crisis, as evidenced by former President Ford's pro-statehood announcement when he left office in 1976 and by the '76 election and recent maneuvers by the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP) in Puerto Rico. The minority position held that within the U.S. ruling class there was at present no consensus, let alone policy, on the solution to Puerto Rico's problems. The drive toward statehood by Romero Barceló and the PNP merely showed that statehood was one of the options of U.S. imperialism for Puerto Rico, but not necessarily the chosen strategy. Fundamentally, the status question would be resolved by U.S. imperialism according to whichever option most benefitted its interests, whether statehood, commonwealth or neo-colonial independence.

The minority view did not oppose work around statehood, but it raised a critique of the "main danger" approach to the status question—especially in the absence of a clear option agreed upon by key U.S. ruling class sectors and in the face of the growing lack of credibility of the PNP. The minority position posed that the main task of the PRSC was to take up the struggle to expose and educate the North American people around the fundamental aspect of the status question: colonialism. In this regard, the options open to imperialism would be exposed as counter to the legitimate aspirations of the Puerto Rican working class and people as a whole for true independence and self-determination. The current examples resulting from the unfolding class struggle provided ample opportunities to take up this work, i.e. Vieques, Natural Resources, the freedom of the four nationalists, the repression of the workers, independence and revolutionary movements in Puerto Rico, etc.

After many hours of debate on the floor of the conference, the delegates voted to adopt the minority position on status as the basis for the PRSC's general perspective on Puerto Rico and in particular, U.S. strategy for Puerto Rico.

The adoption of the minority interim committee position was an important step forward for the PRSC. Its significance lay in the organization's recognition of the need to be more concrete and independent in terms of its analysis of Puerto Rico. This was further emphasized by the passage of a resolution to establish a work group whose purpose was to deepen the PRSC's understanding of Puerto Rico's national reality and U.S imperialism's options in the coming period.

THE NATIONAL SITUATION OF PUERTO RICO AND STATUS

The conference recognized several key elements regarding the present situation in Puerto Rico:

(1) the deepening economic and social crisis confronting the workers and broad masses of people in Puerto Rico.

(2) the role of federal transfer payments, food stamps, and the continued tools of ideological and propagandistic control which undermine the level of mass struggle and objectively pose obstacles to the tasks of developing a higher level of struggle and consciousness in Puerto Rico.

(3) the serious attempts by the pro-statehood PNP to implement its program and the obstacles confronting it represented by the growing loss of credibility of the Barceló Administration.

(4) the fragmentation of the pro-independence forces and the increased level of repression directed against them and the workers' and revolutionary movements.

(5) the need to understand the dynamics involving the pro-commonwealth forces on the island (PPD) which in the recent period have begun to regain strength; the need to study these developments and in particular the implications of the "new" thesis of Rafael Hernandez Colon of the PPD. This thesis is essentially a modified form of the present "free associated state".

While these general points were agreed upon at the conference, there were many additional amendments presented that did not get resolved because of the extensive political debate and the lack of sufficient time. Thus the Political Report, as a whole, including aspects of the present situation in Puerto Rico was not ratified. Nor was the work plan specifying the tasks and campaigns for the next two years able to be discussed and voted on. Thus, as some of its first tasks the new National Board will have to take up these points and guarantee that the amendments and work plan get voted on.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMING PERIOD

The Third National Conference was a very positive step forward for the PRSC. The discussion and debates revealed that the membership sought to deepen its knowledge and understanding of the current reality of Puerto Rico. In the past, the campaigns around Vieques, repression of the labor movement, etc., were seen as issues separate from the struggle for independence; they were not understood as integral components of an overall strategy of the PRSC to expose in as many ways as possible the colonial relationship and concrete moves on the part of U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico. The adoption of the minority status position meant a recognition of the need for concrete educational work, within the PRSC and among the North American people, about the role of U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico.

The desire of the PRSC to have a more consolidated and active national leadership was one of the most significant gains achieved by the conference. This was shown by the election of a new National Board that included a substantial number of individuals who have a proven and sustained practice in Puerto Rico work. The election to the Board of a representative from Non-Intervention in Chile (NICH)—an organization which has taken the initiative to present a proposal addressing the need for further coordination and communication among Latin American solidarity groups—speaks to the desire of the PRSC to place Puerto Rico solidarity work within the framework of other efforts in solidarity with struggles in Latin America. The election of the NICH representative is a recognition of the need to break with the isolation which has historically characterized the U.S. solidarity movement with Latin America in general and the work around Puerto Rico in particular.

For our organization, MINP-El Comité, the significance of completing the political evaluation of the PRSC during its past two years cannot be stressed enough. At the conference in 1977, many forces joined ranks to defeat the March 1st Bloc (see OEM, Vol. 2, #3), whose goal was either to take over the conference, superimposing its ultra-left political line, or destroy the organization. Thus, many of the political discussions which should have been held, were not. The conference closed without a clear definition of a program or strategy and tactics for the PRSC. The last two years have been a process of trying to consolidate the PRSC and develop this program, despite the missing full discussion throughout the membership.

This experience has yet to be fully summarized by the PRSC. Yet it is key to the future work of the PRSC in order for the organization to learn from its experiences—ideologically, politically, and organizationally—overcome its weaknesses and build on its strengths. This evaluation must be taken up by the new National Board as part of the discussion of the overall political evaluation.

The political evaluation and the efforts to correctly sum up lessons and central questions of this National Conference are tasks we look forward to taking up as part of the new leadership of the PRSC and along with the other comrades and members. Although the number of activists has decreased since the last conference, there remains a strong core of serious and highly committed individuals dedicated to moving the work of the PRSC forward in the next two years.

In addition to providing our readers with an understanding of the Third National Conference, we hope that this general evaluation in *Obreros En Marcha* will serve to generate discussion within the PRSC around the character and gains of the conference. ●