

Puerto Rico... U.S. Colony?



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1. Is Puerto Rico a colony?

As the U.S. Supreme Court so aptly put it at the beginning of this century, "Puerto Rico belongs to, but is not part of the United States." Puerto Rico became that "part of the U.S." as a result of the 1898 U.S. military invasion of the island. In the words of Senator Henry Jackson (D-Wa.), Puerto Rico is "war booty."

To this date, the United States maintains nearly total control over the Puerto Rican economy, the use of land and natural resources, and almost all governmental processes. All decisions made in Puerto Rico are subject to final approval or rejection in Washington.

To insure this control, Puerto Rico is forbidden to have its own military, circulate its own currency, maintain its own postal service, regulate its own commerce—these are all under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Government. This inability of a people to determine their own lives and destiny—through the imposition of colonialism—is rejected by the overwhelming majority of the people of the world.

2. Do the Puerto Rican people really want independence? Haven't they consistently voted against it?

Up to now, there has been no election in Puerto Rico acceptable under international law to determine the real desire of the Puerto Rican people. According to the United Nations, self-determination and the independence of a people are inalienable rights. Puerto Rican people have neither. A people cannot decide their destiny if they are not independent and free to choose. Puerto Rico has not been independent since the initial Spanish colonization of 1493. People who suffer military occupation and economic, political and cultural control by a colonizer country cannot freely decide.

The people of Puerto Rico have consistently rebelled against U.S. rule and were met with tremendous repression. The independence movement has suffered massacres, the jailing of its leaders, infiltration, police harassment, and assassinations. Despite this, the movement continues to grow. Today there are independentistas in trade unions, the schools and universities as students and teachers, in the legislature, in the bar association, and there are many prominent supporters of independence in churches and religious organizations. This is the real measure of the Puerto Rican people's desire.

3. Hasn't the U.S. helped Puerto Rico to develop economically and doesn't Puerto Rico have the highest standard of living in Latin America, largely because of U.S. aid?

The Puerto Rican economy has developed, but for U.S. corporations, not for the people who live on the island.

U.S. corporations control over 80% of the economy and have taken over \$12 billion in profits out of Puerto Rico in the last few decades. These companies do not pay taxes on their earnings.

Because this money is privately controlled by these companies, it is not used for building an economy which would benefit the people of Puerto Rico. As the Commonwealth-Government itself describes Puerto Rico for U.S. corporations, it is "Profit Island, U.S.A."

While these companies make huge profits, 65% of Puerto Rican families subsist on U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Food Stamps, 45% are unemployed, and those who are employed, while paying 25% higher prices than in the U.S., earn an average of one-third to one-half less than U.S. workers in the same jobs.

4. Why are there so many Puerto Ricans in the United States?

The Puerto Rican people did not choose to leave their country. The high unemployment rate on the island, coupled with low wages and the excessive cost of living in Puerto Rico, has forced many to the U.S. to look for jobs in order to survive. U.S. corporate interests with the collaboration of the Commonwealth Government deliberately planned this migration as an escape valve for the dangerous problem of chronic unemployment on the island to provide cheap labor for industry in the U.S.

Whatever the total number of Puerto Ricans in the United States at any one time, there is constant travel back and forth from the island. The reason for this is basic to an understanding of the Puerto Rican identity. Many plan one day to acquire enough money and financial security to return to Puerto Rico which they still consider as their homeland.

5. Could Puerto Rico survive without the United States?

More and more, the question becomes, can Puerto Rico continue to survive **with** the United States? In the early part of this century, U.S. economic control of the island meant that only the coffee, sugar, and tobacco industries were developed. As U.S. needs changed and more manufactured goods were needed, agriculture on the island was destroyed. Today, Puerto Rico must import almost all of its food products from the U.S.

To keep manufacturing profitable for the U.S. companies, workers on the island are forced to work at extremely low wages, with a very high unemployment rate. If the Puerto Rican economy were structured to meet the needs of the Puerto Rican people (and not to provide the U.S. with close to one-tenth of its total profits throughout the world), there would be many more jobs for the people. Puerto Ricans could produce many of their basic necessities, and at much lower cost than imported

U.S. goods. They could use their country's **Asian American** industrial base for their own needs, integrated into a **Studies Center** balanced economy.

6. Isn't the U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico necessary to maintain peace in Latin America?

The myth of the U.S. military as a "peace-keeper" was shattered in Viet Nam. Nearly all U.S. military interventions of the U.S. Government are carried out to preserve a status quo favorable to U.S. business interests. The U.S. military uses Puerto Rico as a springboard for both overt and covert illegal operations throughout Latin America, as they did against Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Chile. The maintenance of peace or democracy has never been the real reason for any of these military adventures. This should be clear from U.S. support for the fascist junta which overthrew a democratically elected government in Chile.

7. Who else supports Puerto Rican independence?

One of the most important statements of support for Puerto Rican independence came from the United Nations General Assembly in 1973 when it approved a resolution supporting Puerto Rico's "inalienable right to independence and self-determination." The Conference of Non-Aligned Nations also declared their support for Puerto Rican independence and condemned U.S. colonial rule. Delegates from 79 countries attended a special conference in Havana, Cuba, in September, 1975, called specifically to endorse Puerto Rico's struggle for independence and to provide help for that movement.

8. Why should we in the United States be concerned with Puerto Rican independence?

People in this country understand that the Puerto Rican people have the right to decide what to do with their own lives. We will not allow the U.S. Government to suppress the Puerto Rican independence movement in our name. Support for the Puerto Rican independence struggle grows by leaps and bounds. In October, 1974, 20,000 people rallied in Madison Square Garden to demand independence for Puerto Rico. Now, there is the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee—organized in more than fifteen major cities across the country, which builds support for Puerto Rico's freedom on a day-to-day basis.

In this year, the 200th anniversary of the War of Independence against British colonial rule, we have special reason to honor the right of the Puerto Rican people to full independence.

To learn more about Puerto Rico, subscribe to the bulletin of the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee, **Puerto Rico Libre!**

Independence for Puerto Rico!

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