

“Anti-Colonial Struggle and Leftist Politics: The Relationship between the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, the Communist Party of Puerto Rico, and the Communist Party USA, 1930-1955”

By Margaret Power

When Pedro Albizu Campos, president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party (PRPN), was released from Atlanta Federal Penitentiary in 1943, Earl Browder, General Secretary of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and U.S. Congressman Vito Marcantonio welcomed him in New York City. In this paper I examine the complicated relationship between the PRPN and the CPUSA and Communist Party of Puerto Rico, which was closely aligned with the CPUSA. In a colonial situation, such as that of Puerto Rico, what are the politics of a left-wing political party? Are being revolutionary and leftist the same thing in an anti-colonial struggle? How did the changing politics of the COMINTERN and by extension the CPUSA and CPPR affect both organizations’ relationship with the PRPN?

The Nationalist Party was never a Marxist party. Its primary goal was to achieve independence for Puerto Rico. To answer the questions posed above, I examine two exemplary periods in the parties’ histories. From the 1930s to the 1940s, the Comintern, and thus the CPUSA and the CPPR, advanced the Popular Front political line. Popular Front politics advocated Communist parties ally with all those forces that opposed the common enemy: fascism. This approach led the CPUSA and the CPPR to back the New Deal, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) of Puerto Rico, and Luis Muñoz Marín, PPD leader. In other words, to support policies, a party, and a politician that represented a continuation of U.S. colonial rule in the Island. This stance conflicted directly with that of the Nationalist Party, which advocated independence and labeled the Roosevelt Administration and the PPD as the prime obstacles to be opposed. How did these three parties accommodate these disparate political assessments and choice? The second moment occurred in the 1950s, during the height of the anti-Communist McCarthy hearings in the United States. In 1950, the PRNP staged an unsuccessful military uprising in Puerto Rico and attempted to assassinate President Truman in Washington D.C. to signal to the world their rejection of the moves to turn Puerto Rico into a Free Associated State and thus, ostensibly, end U.S. colonial rule. How did these attacks affect the parties’ relationships with each other?