

of 1934 was the year Hitler rose to power. In 1935, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. In 1936, the Spanish general rebelled against the Republic. Batista was in Cuba. Trujillo next door . . .

THE ROAD TO PONCE

The sugar industry workers' strike of January, 1934, is the starting point whose continuation, politically speaking, is the line that takes us directly to the Ponce Massacre. This great strike marks the point at which Puerto Rico, for the first time in history, represented by the Nationalist Party and with Albizu Campos in the leadership, contended man to man with imperialism to wrest the direct control of the masses out of foreign hands.

The immediate consequence was an imperialist retreat.

This maneuver paralyzed the Puerto Rican offensive, leaving a vacuum the Nationalist Party could not immediately fill. The law of polarity resolved itself into a strengthening of imperialism by its adopting a defensive position. It was at this crucial moment that the petty-bourgeois weakness of the Independentista movement was revealed and the whole situation cried out for a Marxist ally, embodied in a staff of cadres able to transform the immense sympathy and popularity won by Albizu Campos into a solid labor revolutionary organization. But that ally did not exist.

Counting on the impossibility of the Nationalists organizing their natural reserves, imperialism gave in to the demands of the workers. The effect was a general and immediate demobilization of the aroused masses. The Nationalists were deprived, at the same time, of maintaining contact with the working masses and of achieving, even by the torturous trial-and-error method, an elementary labor organization.

The bloody and amazing revolutionary development which followed became, of necessity, a competitive struggle between Albizu's brilliant mind and his courageous followers on one side, and American total power on the other. The Nationalist recovery, of which the Cadets' concentration in Lares, September 23, 1935, and the United Front days of 1936 are examples; the popular emotion in behalf of the Nationalists because of the police assassination of five of their leaders in Rio Piedras, on October 24, 1935; the Utuado street fighting for the flag in January, 1936; the counter-attack in February with the revolutionary execution of Colonel Riggs; the people's indignation at the assassination of Beauchamp and Rosade at Police Headquarters on February 23, 1936; demonstrations against the Federal raids and subpoena citations and the sympathy with the incarcerated Nationalist

General Secretary on April 2, 1936; the great de Diego birthday celebration on April 16, 1936; the patriotic rejoicing on the Tydings Bill that same month; the emotional solidarity which accompanied Albizu Campos and his comrades to prison . . . , all of these were episodes, glorious episodes, of Puerto Rican history. But the reaction prevailed. The imperialists punished the Nationalist leadership in court July the 30th, 1936. And in Ponce, the 21st of March, 1937, the people were given punishment through government-sponsored terror.

THE PONCE MASSACRE

On or about March 14th, Plinio Graciany and Luis Castro Quesada, Nationalist leaders of Ponce, notified the township government that the Nationalist Junta (Committee) would hold a meeting, preceded by a parade, on Sunday, March 21st. Even in those stormy days of 1937, Nationalist parades and meetings were a great popular attraction; even the police respected them because of their discipline and order. The mayor of Ponce, Jose Tormos Diego, promptly gave permission. It should be noted that the request for permission was a courtesy the Nationalists extended to the municipal government. According to Puerto Rican law, permission was not needed for the use of plazas and parks for meetings or parades. This colonial Supreme Court ruling of 1926 was also valid for the streets.

On Friday, March 19th, the Insular Chief of Police, Colonel Orbeta arrived in Ponce to study the situation. (Orbeta was the brother-in-law of Dionisio Trigo, Franco's representative in Puerto Rico. When Trigo died in a Berlin hospital, he was sent to Madrid with a Luftwaffe escort.) Orbeta went back to San Juan and talked with General Winship. There, at that moment, the Massacre was planned and ordered.

Winship ordered Orbeta to go back to Ponce and convince (or coerce) the Mayor to stop the parade.

On March 20th, *the day before the parade was to be held*, the district police chief of Ponce, Captain Felipe Blanco, wrote the following letter to Nationalist leaders Luis Castro Quesada and Plinio Graciany:

"I have the pleasure of acknowledging your letter, dated yesterday, at 7:40 P.M., informing me of the parade of the Cadetes de la Republica and the meeting to be held by the Junta Nacionalista next Sunday, March 21st, in this city of Ponce, the program of which I have read on Page 3 of El Mundo yesterday, which says in part:

" '2:00 P.M.--Divisional Concentration of the Liberation Army,