

(then President of the American Federation of Labor) fearful of an explosion, could not but observe in 1904:

“The salaries being paid now in Puerto Rico are 50 per cent under those that were paid under Spanish rule in most of the industries and in agriculture, and sometimes less. The price of meat is impossible for workers, being higher than it was under the Spaniards. Rice is also expensive, so expensive that to many unhappy workers it has become a delicacy.”

The high price of meat might also be traced to the fantastically criminal concept of Nineteenth Century theoreticians of British-American imperialism, which asserted that a people with a low diet of meat was necessarily docile and, of course, easy to deal with. Puerto Rican cattle were bought at a conqueror's price and shipped away, especially to Texas, with the inevitable shortage of meat in the market and the promotion of imported codfish and canned foods to the Puerto Rican table.

In the 1930's, when the wave of disaster brought to the world by the U.S. crash of October, 1929, swept over Puerto Rico, our country had been under its impact even earlier. Capitalism first inflicts its crisis upon the colonial peoples before it throws the crisis on its own working class. This crisis found a Puerto Rico that for years had been submitted to a one-crop latifundia absentee economy and to American monopoly in commerce.

We had, at the time, 55,519 farms and 52.9 per cent of the total number of farms were less than ten acres in size. They occupied 7.6 per cent of the total farm area, 10.6 per cent of the cultivated land, and their worth amounted to 6.9 per cent of the total value of all lands, buildings, agricultural implements and machinery of all the country's farms.

Three hundred forty-two farms, that is to say, 0.6 per cent of all farms, consisted of 500 or more acres, accounting for 30.9 per cent of the total farm area and 25.8 per cent of land under cultivation. They represented 44.1 per cent of the value of all land and agricultural implements and machinery of the total farming area of the country.

Seventy per-cent of the population lived in the countryside: over 230,000 families consisting of 1,302,898 people. Over eighty per-cent of the families living in the rural areas were landless; they were the families of workers living on a salary, *agregados*, (a semi-feudal relationship or peonage).

A few years later (1941-2), with 70,000 men in the Army and an increase in the construction of military public works, “the coefficient derived from a study of 4,999 workers' families in Puerto Rico was 218 persons working for every 1 000 inhabitants”, counting even those working for a living who were between ten and fourteen years old. Sixty per cent of the workers were jobless!

The 1940 census accordingly showed a drop between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four--the most productive period in the life of laborers--a characteristic which was not present in the 1899 census. This was attributed to tuberculosis which, in 1936, was killing 305 out of every 1,000 Puerto Ricans.

THE CULTURAL TENSION

A public school system was organized in Puerto Rico in 1900 shaped after the one current in U.S. Army camps. The introduction to the text of the 1901 School Law of Puerto Rico, approved by Governor Allen, said: “The most important dispositions of the Military Orders are here embodied”. So English, not Spanish, was the official language in the schools. The military heroes and deeds of the armed forces of the United States were presented to Puerto Rican children as their own, and even foreign languages were taught in English to a Spanish-speaking nation! Puerto Rican history was ignored: all relations of the Puerto Rican historical and cultural heritage with the Latin American sister nations was ignored. And the dislodging of all national consciousness was pursued with the cultivation of an inferiority complex as its fellow traveler.

In the year of 1937, the year of the Ponce Massacre, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed the following letter (the equivalent of a Tsarist ukase) to his underling, the Commissioner of Education of Puerto Rico:

“I desire at this time to make clear the attitude of my administration in the extremely important matter of teaching English in Puerto Rico. It is an indispensable part of American policy that the coming generation of American citizens in Puerto Rico grow up with complete facility in the English tongue. It is the language of our nation. It is only through familiarity with our language that the Puerto Ricans will be able to take full advantage of the economic opportunities which became available to them when they were made American citizens.

“Bilingualism will be achieved by the forthcoming generations of Puerto Ricans only if teaching of English throughout the insular educational system is entered into at once with vigor, purposefulness and devotion, and with the understanding that English is the