

INTRODUCTION

The Ponce Massacre is little known to North Americans but long remembered by Puerto Ricans who love their country.

The story must have been told many times in Spanish. But it seems to us that this is the most complete account in English--at least in recent years. Of course, this event is not included in any official history and needless to say, the public school system of Puerto Rico does not include it in its curriculum -- in either Spanish or English. The lengthy New York obituaries at the death of Albizu Campos on April 21, 1965 are replete with the accounts of his alleged "terrorism," but singularly forgetful about the U.S. terror against his unarmed followers at Ponce.

The present pamphlet contains the story of the massacre itself and in addition, pins the responsibility where it belongs: on Yankee imperialism, led at that time by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The necessarily abridged comments of the author about the Nationalist Party and its great leader, Albizu Campos, are an indispensable guide to the understanding of the larger Puerto Rican liberation struggle as well as the massacre of 1937. The same goes for the author's brief recapitulation of the decades of Yankee tyranny.

There will be those North Americans who wonder why the massacre of 1937 is so important today in the light of the much bloodier events that now shake the world and why this pamphlet should be on their required reading list when the 28-year-old atrocity has paled before the more recent crimes of Hiroshima, Sharpeville, Stanleyville and Vietnam. The importance lies mainly in the relationship of the U.S. rulers to the ruled and in the fact that the U.S. treatment of its "own" colony gives the clue to its real intentions in Africa, Asia, etc.

The story is especially important to the understanding of the role of imperialist liberalism.

Engineered by appointees of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the very heyday of the "Good Neighbor" era inaugurated by that liberal President, the massacre tells us volumes about the true nature of FDR's liberalism--and imperialist liberalism in general. (Since FDR was the very model and prototype of imperialist liberalism!)

Those who have been brought up in the aura of Roosevelt's alleged friendship to labor, his "humanitarianism" etc., may not easily believe Senor Corretjer's story of Roosevelt's involvement and responsibility in this classical act of colonial repression.

The workers of the Republic Steel Company in Chicago during that same year of 1937, however, had occasion to question Roosevelt's dedication to the cause of labor and would have readily understood Roosevelt's responsibility for the Ponce Massacre had they known even a few of the facts.

On Memorial Day of that year, a peaceful parade of unarmed steelworkers trying to organize a union, was fired upon by policemen. Without provocation, in broad daylight, these cops killed ten marchers and wounded scores of others.

Roosevelt was asked to make a statement condemning the slaughter and he cheered the widows and orphans with the often-quoted remark: "A plague on both your houses!" (i.e. the houses of capital and labor). John L. Lewis, then head of the militant CIO, publicly condemned Roosevelt for this and all but broke with him. Lewis well understood that beneath an apparently intemperate and thoughtless brutality on Roosevelt's part was a calculated and deliberate signal to the U. S. ruling class that his "pro-labor" bias went just so far and no farther.

Now Roosevelt's callousness to the massacred steelworkers did not materially affect his popularity in other quarters. And the myth of his great benefactions to labor was rather fortified in later years (mostly by the leadership of the same labor movement he tamed and so to speak, "legalized"). Both liberals and reactionaries, each in their own way and each with their own reasons, continued to build up Roosevelt's reputation.

But the point is that if Roosevelt could get away with such an attitude in the case of workers in Chicago, how much easier it was for him to do so in the case of distant and "foreign" Puerto Rico -- even though his complicity was much greater!

Puerto Rico was an open colony of the U.S. at that time without even the fig leaf of commonwealth status or the euphemistic subtitle of "Free Associated State." Few North Americans paid any attention to it. And most of those who did were chauvinists and racists who regarded Puerto Ricans as automatically inferior to "Americans."

The man now occupying the White House is now organizing a far bigger massacre in Vietnam than Roosevelt's henchmen did in Puerto Rico. He would be no less ready than Roosevelt to massacre Puerto Ricans if they should, like the Vietnamese, choose freedom.

It is partly in the hope of preventing such an eventuality that this pamphlet has been written for the North American public. The Puerto Ricans will fight as bravely for their independence as any other nation on earth when their time comes. But the active sympathy of all progressives in the United States is clearly a key requirement for the freedom of this little country, virtually occupied as it is by U.S. troops and often surrounded by U.S. battleships.

At the moment, it is true, the freedom struggle in Puerto Rico does not indicate any immediate large-scale drive for independence. But as the author says, "*What is real is often not visible.*"

This is not a statement of faith in mysticism, but an assertion of the profound driving forces of liberation which move beneath man's consciousness, so to speak, and only push their way to the surface--to the "visible"--on special occasions.

These special occasions are known to history as *revolutions*. The Puerto Rican revolution is not now so visible as it was just prior to March 21, 1937. But it is real, nevertheless, and it will win in spite of everything.

VINCENT COPELAND