

# Gov't Network Sterilizes Workers

*The following is the second and last part of a two-part article (see Volume 2, No. 5, December 1974).*

The charge of genocide backed by the United States Government has been levelled at the Puerto Rican Government's population control programs, which today are sterilizing thousands of Puerto Rican women each month. 35% of the island's female population is already sterilized. The charge has been made by various sectors of the people on the island, and by independence leaders in the United Nations last fall.

The Commonwealth Government has publicly brushed aside these accusations, denying that it has any over-all "plan" or "goal" for the sterilization of Puerto Rican women other than the general objective of reducing the population growth in Puerto Rico to zero through voluntary birth control programs. But this public stance is in contradiction with a private document entitled "Opportunities for Employment, Education and Training", written in 1973 by governmental advisors Luis Silva Recio, head of the Department of Labor; Teodoro Moscoso, Administrator of FOMENTO and overseer of Puerto Rico's rapid industrialization program which brought thousands of U.S. corporations to the island; Dr. Ramon Cruz, Secretary of Education, and Amador Cobas, then President of the University of Puerto Rico.

## The Sterilization Program Today

According to Dr. Antonio Silva, Secretary of Family Planning of the Department of Health, there are no restrictions of age or number of children as there have been in the past; in today's "voluntary" program sterilization is available to anyone in free clinics set up by the Department of Health.

The *New York Times* of November 4, 1974 reports 19 free sterilization clinics have opened up this year on the island outside of San Juan, which has its own program. The clinics "have been operating a top capacity program of about 1,000 sterilizations per month."

"The basic requirement is the consent of the person", says Dr. Antonio Silva, Secretary of Family Planning of the Department of Health, in an interview with *Avance* in June, 1974. When questioned whether this was wise for, say, a young woman who may change her mind later, he answered "... we believe that all people should have control over their own bodies".

A look at the 1973 report, "Opportunities for Employment, Education and Training" gives more of a picture of population "control" taking place through a network of government agencies and private U.S.-financed organizations, rather than individual demand and consent.

## The Department of Health Network

In the report, two basic "focuses" are given for the organization of population control which is considered essential in solving the economic crisis on the island. The first is a scheme centralized through the Department of Health, which would carry out population control within the general framework of

the "health of the mother and child". This plan sees the Program of Mothers and Children of the Department of Health as the "natural means" to attract the "potential clientele", which the report has already identified as the entire female population of child-bearing age as yet unsterilized.

The report points out that the family planning program of the Department of Health, which was a separate program, has been integrated into the Program of Mothers and Children and is now being carried out through doctors and obstetrics nurses. The teaching of family planning begins with prenatal hospital care; once the mothers have given birth, they are given appointments to return "as much to treat them medically as to make available contraceptive methods and the possibilities of sterilization."

The report goes on to explore the relationship between this centralized plan and the other agencies which are carrying on population control programs. Within the Department of Health scheme, the report states, the Social Services Department would be "limited" to giving "orientation" on birth control to mothers receiving welfare, and referring them to the Department of Health program. Previously, the Department of Social Services had a budget of \$500,000 for their program of "recruitment and orientation". If they become integrated into the Department of Health program, they can only count on \$100,000 and a staff of 13 fieldworkers. The Department of Social Services considers this to be totally inadequate for its "clientele" and estimates it will need at least a half a million dollars if not more to give adequate service especially when the Food Stamp program goes into effect which would bring the number of families "susceptible to this kind of orientation" up to 250,000.

Apparently not only the Social Services Department is involved in population control but also the Department of Housing, which has "Social Programs" offering "orientation, education and motivation" to the families they serve. The Department of Health is also holding talks with the Department of Education to establish a curriculum of population and sex education in high schools.

Under the centralized Department of Health scheme, the private Family Planning Association would serve as a recruitment and follow-up agency to the Department of Health program.

## Population Propaganda in Puerto Rico

The second focus of population control expressed in the 1973 report sees the necessity for sterilization to be viewed by the people of Puerto Rico in a much broader context than as a solution to a health problem. A wide consciousness must be created as to the realities of population problems, explaining to mothers just what the birth of their children will mean to the island, and carrying on sexual education of the young. The Agency which has been carrying this out, and which the report

sees as well-equipped, with its 19 years of history, its experienced staff, and its island-wide structure, to expand is the private Association of Family Planning. The report strongly emphasizes this broader function, and recommends that the Association carry it on as well as the functions of "recruitment and follow-up" within the scheme of the Department of Health.

The population control "philosophy" is expressed succinctly within a couple of sentences of the report: "Well-directed population planning is a necessary instrument by which the Government of Puerto Rico is able to reach the objectives of providing its population with the basic necessities of health, education, housing, transportation, communication, recreation, spiritual well-being, and employment."

Clearly, if there is a problem in any one of these areas, it is because there are too many people. In fact, the report indicates that the worse off you are, the more you are a victim of over-population: "those who suffer most from a condition of excess population are the groups with the least income and smallest amount of education."

### Economics and Sterilization

Alongside this philosophy are the economic figures and facts, the real basis of the document, mentioned at the beginning of this article (*see Part One*). Unemployment, *always* high in Puerto Rico, has reached an "official" level of 12.5% (unofficially 30%) and will climb much higher in the years to come unless measures are taken to "reduce the working sector" of the population . . . through sterilization and migration.

The report also goes on to point out economic alternatives for the future, all of which, apparently, would need the aid of sterilization and migration programs. They are 1) to encourage the growth of light industry through satellite industries to the existing petroleum industry 2) to increase heavy industry (including the strip-mining of Puerto Rico's copper deposits) while at the same time slightly reducing light industry, and 3) to significantly increase heavy industry and decrease light industry. An element the report doesn't mention is that these industries are U.S.-owned. The U.S. directly controls 85% of the corporations on the island.

It is the second option that this report endorses, but it is the third possibility that many observers see actually taking place on the island. Today, petroleum and petrochemical industries represent over one-third or \$1.3 billion of the total investment in Puerto Rico. Recently the biggest petroleum and petrochemical companies on the island, CORCO, Union Carbide, Gulf Oil, and Pittsburgh Plate Glass have all announced major expansions. (*See Puerto Rico Libre!*, Vol. 2, No. 1, August 1974). These industries produce basic and intermediate products for export to the United States. The satellite industries producing finished products have been promised by the colonial government for years, but have never materialized. The plans for a petroleum superport, recently re-initiated, and for strip-mining of central copper deposits would mean the virtual takeover of the economy by heavy industry.

"Heavy" industry is industry which requires large amounts of capital invested in complex machinery but which requires a relatively small workforce. The United States, investing huge

amounts of capital in this type of industry on the island is faced with a dilemma: how to solve the problem of increasing unemployment and instability which, with a rapidly growing movement for independence, could threaten U.S. hegemony? One solution is to simply get rid of the excess working population.

### Sterilization — A U.S. Program

Statistics from a study by the Population Studies Department of the University of Puerto Rico, based on the Master Sample Survey of the Department of Health (conducted quarterly to investigate medical aspects of the island's population) show that it is indeed the working class which is being "reduced".

Of the hundreds of people interviewed, the highest rate of sterilization occurred among the \$4,000 - \$5,000 per year income bracket. 43.8 per cent of the people interviewed at that income level were sterilized. When women interviewed were analyzed according to their husbands' profession, no significant difference showed up between the number of women sterilized whose husbands had "white collar jobs" or "blue collar jobs" — with about 37% of each category sterilized. But when the study distinguishes within the white collar bracket between "professional jobs" and other "white collar jobs", it shows the rate of sterilization to be much lower among "professionals".

A striking revelation of the 1968 study was the young age at which Puerto Rican women are being sterilized. As opposed to similar studies done by Hill, Stycos and Back in the 1950's, which showed sterilization occurring late in married life, almost two-thirds of the women in the 1968 study were sterilized between the age of 20-29, while 92% of the women were sterilized before the age of 35 years. The average age for sterilization was 26. The study refers to the comparative international studies of Harriet B. Presser, which shows that Puerto Rican women are the youngest in the world to be sterilized.

The evidence adds up to a frightening picture: thousands of women sterilized each month, at a young age, through a carefully planned government network. Welfare women, people receiving foodstamps, people who want housing — are all receiving special "orientation". Hospitals which are otherwise noted for poor medical care are carrying on a mammoth population control program. People who have inadequate wages, facing food shortages, skyrocketing prices and unemployment are offered free sterilization and the idea that Puerto Rico's economic problems are problems of overpopulation. Even the term "sex education" takes on a sinister connotation of young people being prepared with "population theories" for future sterilization.

The fact that this is being carried on in a colonial context in a nation where people do not have control over their own lives and their own government makes the term "voluntary" sterilization completely inapplicable. Just as the Puerto Rican economy is controlled by U.S. corporations and the Puerto Rican government is controlled by the U.S. Congress, sterilization must be viewed as a U.S. program. It is our responsibility to demand an end to it.