

Genocidal plan against the Puerto Rican people

The history of this plan goes back to 1925 when a birth control campaign was launched by a committee of citizens. This campaign also marked the beginning of massive experimentation with contraceptives on women in rural towns and areas in the interior of the Island. The first stage continued up to 1932, with some opposition from the Catholic Church and with the support of the Protestant Churches. During that period, a clinic for contraceptive services was opened, but it closed after a year for lack of backing. In 1936, Governor Blanton Winship, of the United States, officially incorporated family planning programs into the regular health plans of the "Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration." But the hierarchy of the US Catholic Church pressured the US Congress against the plan and the latter threatened to suspend maternity-care services if it wasn't dropped. In order to relieve the federal government from implementing the program, the colonial legislature in 1937 authorized a massive project of population control; the plan failed in 1940 with the advent of a health secretary who opposed it.

World War II saved the government from the need to devote efforts to family planning until 1946. During that year, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), still in power today, began a new campaign and

created the Association of Population Studies which, in 1954, became the Puerto Rican Family Welfare Association. Already in 1949, 17.8% of child births in hospitals were followed by sterilizations¹; according to a survey made the same year, 21% of those interviewed had been sterilized.²

With the creation of the Family Welfare Association, the program was extended and modernized. Its financing and the services offered varied according to the necessities, regulations and requirements of the sponsoring agencies or entities. At the beginning, the Association was sustained mainly by donations from US individuals and organizations, such as the gift of a million dollars from Joseph Sunnen³, which provid-

1. P. T. Plotrov, *World Population Crisis: The United States Response*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1973, pp. 31-32.
2. J. M. Stycos, "Cultural Checks on Birth Control Use", *Proceedings of a Round Table at the 1933 Annual Conference of the Milbank Memorial Fund*, New York, 1974, p. 63.
3. Asociación Puertorriqueña Pro-Bienestar de la Familia. *La Asociación Puertorriqueña Pro-Bienestar de la Familia en el Movimiento de planificación familiar en Puerto Rico*. Hato Rey, Puerto Rico, May., 1972, p. 2.

ed the basic support up until 1966. This money made it possible to offer "educational" material and medical-supervised contraceptive services; to carry out a series of studies that included experiments with the contraceptive pill Enovid; and to implement a broad plan for sterilizing women and men. The three reasons the Association gave to justify this program were:

1. Since the poor live from day to day, the institution points out that this method provides greater security;
2. Couples begin to have children very early and this implies an excessively prolonged use of contraceptives; and
3. The use of contraceptives by Catholics means that they have to confess every time they use them while, if they are sterilized, they only have to confess once and it's all over.⁴

As a measure of extending its reach, the Association implemented a recruitment program for voluntary leaders as an essential weapon in penetrating more remote communities. Since 1966, the Association has had financing from the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, amounting to \$750 000 in 1972 which, together with the designation of \$100 000 from the colo-

nial government and \$50 000 in private donations, gave the Association a budget of \$900 000 for 1972.⁵

In 1970, the then colonial governor Luis Ferré, in his message to the colonial legislature, recommended adoption of an intensive family planning program. A master plan was conceived, coordinating the efforts and resources of the departments of Health and Social Services of the Public Health School of the University of Puerto Rico, the administration of social programs of the Department of Agriculture and the Family Welfare Association. Because of a number of limitations, the expectations for coordination and organization were not realized, accentuating the organizing crisis among birth control forces. In 1973, a commission of officials from the Committee on Population Crisis and the International Federation of Family Planning, visited the present colonial governor, Rafael Hernández Colón and offered him a series of measures to effectively implement the program, which culminated in 1974 in the creation of the Secretariat of Family Planning. Many of the goals projected for that year were fulfilled or surpassed and contributed substantially to the present panorama of the population control program in Puerto Rico. During fiscal year 1974-1975 alone, the governmental budget for the massive sterilization program was \$6 million, and more than 300 sterilizations a month were done on women of child-bearing age.

It is estimated that the feminine population between the ages of 15

4. "Ataques a la vida y la planificación familiar", Aguas Buenas, December, 1972., January, 1973.



5. "Informe del Sub-comité del Taller de Empleo, Adiestramiento y Educación en Taller de Empleo" Los Talleres del Nuevo Puerto Rico, November, 1973, p. 70.

and 49 years old totals 595 000, of whom some 110 000 live in San Juan, the capital. According to government figures on sterilization, more than 33% of the feminine population of child-bearing age has been sterilized⁶, which would make a total of approximately 196 000 women sterilized (although it is very probable that the percentage for San Juan is higher than for the rest of the Island). Of the women outside San Juan, there are some 325 585 among the potential clientel. Of these, 75 000 are active in one of the programs, leaving a potential reserve of 250 585. In San Juan there are more than 60 000 women that fall within these categories and are included in a model project run by the Public Health School and the Health Department⁷. These figures are the result of the opening and coordination of new sterilization clinics which, in 1974 alone, totalled 30⁸.

In 1974, 35% of the Puerto Rican population of reproductive age, used some type of contraceptive service.⁹ The services are available to all who want them, but "the program's efforts in terms of orientation and recruitment will be principally directed toward those population sectors and groups that most need them, on the basis of the public

policy the State defines,"¹⁰ which means toward the medically indigent population. According to a study made in October, 1974,¹¹ using a low-income female sample, 33.5% of women of reproductive age stated they had been sterilized. It is interesting to note that, in this study, 50% of the women between 30 and 34 years old had been sterilized.

Male sterilizations are much less frequent and the figures are not precise, since even in public government statistics, there is no specific mention of them, in spite of the fact that the services exist and are used. There are a number of factors that might explain this. First, the existence of certain cultural patterns that raise the capacity of procreation to the level of a virility factor, and which stigmatize the sterile woman less than the man, especially if she has been sterilized after giving birth several times. At the same time, the Family Planning Program is directed toward the feminine population, since the educational policy and recruitment of the secretariat of Family Planning revolve around the maternity care centers.

All these efforts are reflected in the birth rate, as follows:

1950	—	40.1
1960	—	33.5
1971	—	25.8
1973	—	23.3

This last rate represented a drop

6. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Plan de trabajo-Año Fiscal 1974-75. Departamento de Salud; Secretaría de Planificación Familiar, p. 44.

9. Departamento de Salud. "Informe sobre el Proyecto de Planificación de la Familia en Taller de Empleo"; Los Talleres del Nuevo Puerto Rico, November, 1973, p. 13.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Saúl Fratts. El uso de anticonceptivos y la esterilización en las familias pobres de Puerto Rico, October, 1974, (in preparation).

of 58% from 1950.¹²

To complete the picture of population control in Puerto Rico, there is another factor that must be considered: migration.

Migration is an escape valve for population decrease and this was especially true during the '50s and the '60s. During the '50s, emigration averaged 44 000 persons a year; during the '60s, the average annual emigration was 15 000 persons.¹³ In recent years, however, we have had a situation of net immigration due to the fact that greater numbers are returning and fewer are leaving. (In addition to the foreigners entering).

The migratory currents of Puerto Ricans have responded to a number of factors. First, to the greater or lesser necessity of the US economy for a cheap and unskilled work force, a factor that determines the employment conditions that await Puerto Ricans in the metropolises where, according to a study,¹⁴ 51.4% of Puerto Rican migrants in New York live in conditions of extreme poverty and racial discrimination. In the third place, there are few Puerto Ricans who go with the intention of integrating into US so-

ciety. According to government figures, of those who return 89% of the men and 90% of the women are of reproductive age.¹⁵

In terms of migration, we must also take into account the foreign residents in Puerto Rico who totalled 10 414 (0.44% of the population) in 1960, and reached 52 792 or 1.95% of the population in 1970.¹⁶ Puerto Rico has no type of ruling power or right over the entrance of foreigners. Moreover, in this sense, the United States citizen does not consider himself a foreigner; nor do US residents in Puerto Rico, nor foreign-born nationalized US citizens. It is estimated that there are more than 100 000 of them.

Faced with this situation, what does the Puerto Rican government propose

According to the Planning Board, and depending on the policy the government adopts, there are two possibilities for 1985, based on the following contingencies:

Total population	3 466 181
Migration (net annual balance) minus	8 000
Birth rate per 1 000 inhabitants	25.9
Total rate of fertility	3.3

The total rate of fertility, which dropped from 4.8 in 1960 to 3.2 in 1972, is not attributed to Puerto Rico's colonial situation but to a phenomenon which occurs "in economi-

12. Plan de Trabajo - Año Fiscal 1974-75. Departamento de Salud; Secretaría de Planificación Familiar (p. 36).

13. "Informe del Subcomité del Taller de Empleo, Adiestramiento y Educación", p. 69.

14. Un estudio de las condiciones de pobreza en la comunidad puertorriqueña de Nueva York; Puerto Rico Forum, Inc. 1970 (mentioned in "Informe del Sub-comité del Taller de Empleo, Adiestramiento y Educación," p. 78).

15. Informe del Subcomité del Taller de Empleo, Adiestramiento y Educación," p. 78.

16. *Ibid.*



cally and industrially developing countries." But it noted that the point is being reached where reduction will be slower all the time without vigorous implementation of a family planning program aimed at reducing the birth rate. On the other hand, this first projection presupposes the net departure of 8 000 Puerto Ricans a year (on an average) even if the birth rate and fertility rate remain stable.

The second possibility is different, and is the following:

Population in 1985	3 649 767
Migration (net annual balance) plus	16 000
Births:	
Birth rate per 1000 inhabitants	21.4
Total fertility rate	2.4

This calculation stems from a net immigration of 16 000 a year, instead of an emigration of 8 000. With a balance of 0 migration in this projection, the total population in 1985 would be between 3 300 000 and 3 400 000. Supposing that 8 000 migrate annually, with the reduction in the birth rate and the fertility rate, in 1985 the population of the island would be 2 200 000 or 2 300 000.¹⁷

What then are the colonial government's alternatives for population control? They are based on the strategy of family planning and on the migratory strategy.

Of the objectives that the Secretariat of Family Planning has projected for 1975, we reprint here the most alarming:

1. Coordination in factories and

in workers' unions in order to utilize their facilities to bring family planning services to their personnel and members in a more direct and effective form, establishing orientation centers in the unions and factories;

2. 5 000 sterilizations during fiscal year 1974-1975 and successive years;

3. Creation of a project of mobile units that will reach 4 320 additional patients;

4. An increase of 41 500 new cases throughout the island;

5. Creation of a sex education and family planning program for elementary schools.¹⁸

All this is aimed at achieving the sterilization of 300 000 Puerto Ricans of reproductive age¹⁹ in 1976 and use of some contraceptive method by 50% of the total population in 1977.²⁰ Although there are differences in focus in each of the alternatives involved, both agree that the priority of techniques to be used is: 1) sterilization; 2) contraceptive methods; 3) education, broadly disseminated.²¹

18. Plan de Trabajo - Año Fiscal 1974-75, p. 51-55.

19. Jeanette Aifaro. "Esterilizadas 300 mil boricuas" (Entrevista de prensa con el Director del Programa de Planificación Familiar, Dr. Antonio Silva Iglesia, published in *El Nuevo Día*, 1974).

20. "Informe sobre el Proyecto de Planificación Familiar", p. 13. Departamento de Salud.

21. "Informe del Subcomité del Taller de Empleo, Adiestramiento y Educación", p. 76.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

In terms of migration, there are two possible alternatives, or a combination of both. One would be to adopt a passive policy in response to the spontaneous migratory flow, with a minimum of orientation for the migrant. The other would be an active policy of orientation that would provide the migrant with a number of essential services to encourage him or her to leave, to adapt and to remain. The Puerto Rican colonial governor's sub-committee on Employment, Training and Education enthusiastically recommends the second alternative and offers certain suggestions which, in general terms, include:

1) Giving the migrant orientation that emphasizes the many opportunities in the United States, compared to the few opportunities on the Island.

2) Channeling emigration toward new and more auspicious locations, creating job opportunities in these places so that this can be disseminated among the unemployed who come to the Employment Service.

3) Developing a program of Work Contracts in non-agricultural work, similar to the program of agricultural contracts ("although with different terms," they note), referred to as "organized emigration," based on the needs of large-scale enterprises for a work force.

4) Providing emigrants with skills as well, so they can secure better jobs and adapt quickly.

5) But should they decide to return to Puerto Rico even so, there should be an orientation program concerning job problems and living

conditions existing in Puerto Rico. The organization that will govern the coordination of contraceptive and migratory strategy will be a Permanent Commission of Population Planning.²² The solution is obvious: the fewer the Puerto Ricans, the fewer the problems.

The myth of "overpopulation"

What the government of Puerto Rico presents from a neo-Malthusian perspective (arithmetic multiplication of resources versus geometric multiplication of the population) is really one more manifestation of the class struggle and of imperialism in our lives as an exploited and openly colonized people. The pseudo-solutions proposed by the colonial government of Puerto Rico, for a supposed population problem, are simply one more element in the strategy of pillage and exploitation that imperialism has projected for the entire Third World.

The reactionary and no-less anachronistic ideas of Malthus gained acceptance as an ideology and program of imperialist action, as a way to oppress the people and prevent the people from confronting them. It is not by chance that the movement for population control is linked to such names as Carnegie, Harriman, Kellogg, Scripps, Moore, Rockefeller and Ford. In 1952, the Ford family invested \$3 million, or a third of the financing, for studies by the Population Council. It also monopolized the financing of studies on reproductive biology, providing \$50 million between 1959 and 1970. Among other things, anti-ovulatory agents were studied and the intra-uterine method of contraception was perfected. Naturally, the experiments were made on Third World

22. Ibid, p. 79.



women.²³ Nor is it by chance that the Agency of International Development (AID) gave high priority to family planning; nor that the decrepit Alliance for Progress adopted neo-Malthusian methods from the beginning. The director of this program is Teodoro Moscoso, a Puerto Rican whose participation in population control programs in Puerto Rico has been very outstanding since the decade of the '20s. It was he who recommended AID tactics that would facilitate persuading the governments of Latin America to adopt programs of demographic control. In 1964, he succeeded in having the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee approve the money necessary for the first programs officially financed by the US State Department. This financing consisted of aid from the Pan-American Health Organization and the Latin-American Demographic Center (CELADE), under United Nations auspices, with headquarters in Chile. In 1964, AID and the International Federation of Planning sponsored a conference on population held in Puerto Rico in which all the governments of Latin America with the exception of Cuba were present.²⁴

The problem is certainly global in scope. Imperialism has attempted to control the growth of the revolutionary class of our period, guided by reactionary neo-Malthusian theories which, not by chance, absolve hunger, poverty and the crime of the economic and political structures of a society. The imperialist policy

of population control affects Puerto Ricans as members of the Third World, but in our case this fact acquires dimensions of genocide. Our island, which is only 3 400 miles long, is a spot of earth with incalculable wealth, in spite of the falsity which has been institutionalized concerning our economic reality. From the recently discovered natural wealth and the strategic position it holds, to our most precious and basic resource — Puerto Ricans —. Borinquen soil is very highly desirable for development of imperialist interests. In their plans, there is only one thing in excess: the Puerto Ricans who are not indispensable to their program of highly technical industrialization. The industries the North Americans established during the '60s do not solve either the population problem or any other problem of the people because they are highly technological industries of big capital and few workers.

What Puerto Rico has is a relative overpopulation with respect to its economic and political structure which is dependent on the United States through the under-utilization of natural resources which leads to under-utilization of human resources, as a reflection of this dependency. Puerto Rico's basic problem is not overpopulation. Overpopulation is a myth they have tried to impose on the people to confuse them.

The only solution to the population problem is economic and political independence, the creation of a socialist society with a just social order for all human beings, where oppression will be an anachronism. The entire Puerto Rican people are working toward this goal.

23. Bonnie Mars: "An Historical Sketch for the American Population Control Movement" *International Journal of Health Services*: Vol. IV No. 4, 1974. (p. 4 - 10).

24. *ibid.*, p. 10.

