

Puerto Rico Tribunal and the crimes of colonialism

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Last October in New York City, the International Tribunal on U.S. Colonial Crimes Against Puerto Rico was convened. Dozens of testimonies summarized some of the crimes committed against my people since 1898.

But all these crimes were only manifestations of the greatest crime: colonialism.

For example, crimes against the environment that are intensifying to this day, crimes that have taken away the health and the lives of hundreds of Boricua people through military contamination and industrial contamination. Particularly today, one source that is being fought very strongly is the contamination by the U.S. corporation AES.

AES burns coal brought from Colombia and dumps the toxic ashes in several places on the island. These ashes percolate through the aquifers that provide drinking water to the residents of those areas. They are spread through the wind. They contaminate the soil where vegetables are grown.

Crimes against our culture, our language, our own history, its knowledge, have been denied, have been suppressed. Our independence heroes have been erased from the history taught at school. Our children learn about Lincoln and Washington, but not our Betances or De Hostos. The attempt is to take our national pride away, make us docile colonial subjects.

Crimes against our education, which now will be denied to the poorest Boricuas with the closing of hundreds of schools and the privatization of the rest in the hands of U.S. companies. There is even an effort to destroy our national public university, the UPR.

Crimes against any possibility of developing the archipelago's infrastructure and a sustainable economy and agriculture. That way, U.S. corporations have a dependable source of profits. A colony exists to enrich its master and not the other way around!

There were testimonies of population control, of the militarization to serve U.S. interests.

And of the political repression of the independence movement that started the very day that the U.S. invaded and has only grown to this day in the most sophisticated manner.

The Puerto Rico Tribunal concludes

The tribunal jury deliberated for two hours and rendered the verdict: It found the U.S. government guilty for crimes against humanity, and demanded that:

1. The U.S. government acknowledge and apologize for the aforementioned crimes against the Puerto Rican people
2. The U.S. surrender all property and power forcibly taken from the Puerto Rican People
3. The U.S. pay reparations to victims of the crime of colonialism

But this redress is only possible if the people — you — people in the U.S. and worldwide exert their pressure. The tribunal was not only one day of testimonies. It is an ongoing process until the Boricua people are free.

I urge you to follow and communicate with the tribunal in its webpage, PuertoRicoTribunal.org, and in Facebook. Together, we can make it possible!

I would like to end by placing the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico in a more global context.

Puerto Rico has always been used as a laboratory by the U.S. In Vieques, the U.S. Navy practiced the exercises to invade other countries, like Grenada and Panamá, and tested weapons used in their criminal war against Iraq. Puerto Rican people were used as guinea pigs for the testing of drugs that benefited U.S. pharmaceutical companies.

Now it's a new kind of laboratory experiment: a new kind of dictatorship and economic model.

Now that capitalism is in its death throes, it is trying to survive at all costs. Taking back the gains won by the working class worldwide. Intensifying divisions and hatred. Imposing the most criminal neoliberal austerity programs. And this is not just Trump. It is a desperate attempt of the bourgeoisie to keep their system alive, using anything and stopping at nothing. Trying to destroy countries that have attempted a degree of autonomy and distance from U.S. imperialism.

This is where Puerto Rico fits the new U.S. aims. What better place for this than a colony that has absolutely no sovereignty? A corrupt fiscal control board was imposed on Puerto Rico two years ago. It was presented as a way to solve the bankruptcy that the U.S. immersed the archipelago in with a debt of \$74 billion. Instead, its real function has been to restructure Puerto Rico to better serve the interests of Wall Street.

That is why the people of Puerto Rico now are demanding an end to the fiscal control board and the Promesa Law — the one that under Obama imposed the fiscal control board.

But the Boricua people cannot do it alone. We, in this country particularly, have to stand actively in solidarity with them. It requires a global struggle. In this globalized world, no country can struggle alone, and particularly, when most of the attacks emanate from this criminal, racist and terrorist United States.

Long live international solidarity! Free Puerto Rico Now!

