FREEDOM FOR THE PUERTO RICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR

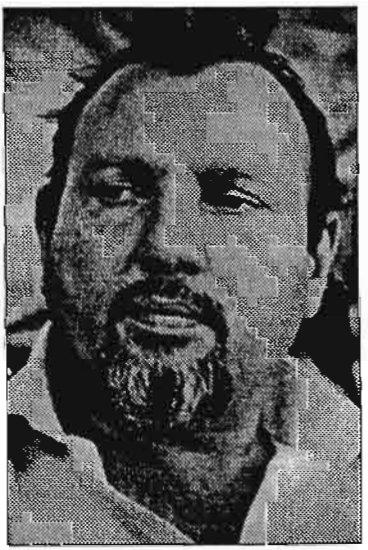
ProLIBERTAD Campaign for the Freedom of Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War

CORRECTION: Page 4, **Punitive Sentences**, 2nd Paragraph. Sentence Beginning **" Fourteen of The Puerto Rican Political Prisoners have already served between 10 and 14 years in prison."**

on Puerto Rican citizens for strictly political reasons in clear violation of the Puerto Rican Constitution; in September, 1994 an ex-member of the intelligence division of the Puerto Rican Police was arrested and accused of (along with other members of his division) kidnapping, torturing, and the assassinating the labor leader, Juan Rafael Caballero, in 1977.

International law denounces colonialism as a crime and recognizes a colonized people's right to end colonialism by any means at their disposal. The United Nations recognizes that these laws apply to the case of Puerto Rico. For many years now, the United Nations' Decolonization Committee has approved resolutions recognizing the inalienable right of Puerto Rico's people to independence and self-determination.

The actions of the Puerto Rican political prisoners are comparable to those of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Washington and Jefferson denounced the tyranny of British control over their colonies. They fought for the principle of democracy, and gained independence. Similarly, the US government recognized that Nelson Mandela's imprisonment by the South African apartheid government was unjust. Mandela was jailed for 27 years on charges of attempting to overthrow the apartheid government through violent means. Like Washington, Jefferson and Mandela before them, the Puerto Rican political prisoners are conscientious activists for freedom and justice, not criminals.



Antonio Comocho Negron

The Arrests

In a series of arrests carried out between 1980 and 1985 around 30 people were accused of acting or conspiring to overthrow the authority of the U.S. government in Puerto Rico through force, in other words acting in favor of Puerto Rico's independence and self-determination. At the beginning of the 1980's fourteen people accused of being members of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN, its acronym in Spanish) were arrested. At the time of their arrest they declared themselves to be combatants in an anti-colonial war to liberate Puerto Rico from U.S. domination and invoked prisoner of war status. They argued that the U.S. courts and its political subdivisions did not have jurisdiction to try them as criminals and petitioned for their cases to be handed over to an international, impartial court that would determine their status. The U.S. government did not recognize their request. Today these individuals are serving sentences of 35 to 90 years.

On August 30, 1985 hundreds of FBI agents descended on Puerto Rico and

searched the houses and offices of independence supporters. Thirteen people were arrested that day and three others later on. These people were immediately removed from Puerto Rico in military transport and moved to the United States where they were held in preventative detention, some for as long as three years, without bail being set. They were accused of conspiring to rob $7.5 million from Wells Fargo, an action for which the clandestine group "Los Macheteros" had taken responsibility. The charges included transporting the money outside the United States and using the money to buy and distribute toys to poor Puerto Rican children. Of the accused, one was found innocent and the government dropped charges against another one. The rest of the accused were sentenced to between 5 to 55 years. Seven of them have already completed their sentences or are about to complete them.

Punitive Sentences

The sentences received by these Puerto Rican patriots are excessive and punitive. Their goal is to punish political activity, militancy, and affiliation. Ten of the fourteen arrested between 1980 and 1983 were sentenced to serve terms of between 55 and 90 years. The average sentence among this group is 71.6 years: 70.8 years for the men and 72.8 years for the women. These sentences are 19 times longer than the average sentence given out during the year that they were sentenced. The majority are serving the equivalent of a life sentence. Of those that were arrested as a result of the Wells Fargo case, two were sentenced to more than 50 years in prison.

Common prisoners, those who commit criminal offenses, receive sentences that are much shorter. For example, statistics from the federal court system show that between 1966 and 1985 the average sentence for all those people found guilty of murder was 22.7 years; of rape, 12.5 years; of violation of arms laws, 12 years. Only 12.8% of all federal prisoners have sentences of more than 20 years.[1] Also the statistics show that those people with previous criminal records receive longer sentences. None of the Puerto Rican patriots in prison had a prior criminal record at the time of their arrest.

Carmen Valentin

In reality, the longest time served by any prisoners in federal custody is for kidnapping: 5.3 years.[2] A study shows that those persons sentenced by state courts for serious violent crimes served between 2.5 and 4 years. ***Fourteen of The Puerto Rican Political Prisoners have already served between 10 and 4 years in prison.*** The political nature of these sentences is made evident by comparing them to the preferential treatment given to people linked to right-wing, anti-communist, or anti-abortion groups accused of violent

Today while I write this letter I have been 36 hours without going out and tomorrow if they do not take us out it will have three days without moving from this same space. In this little space I have to do everything. From eating my meals to taking care of my needs. So it is my dining room and latrine at the same time. My bed is a slab of cement. And the whole cell is painted the same dead yellow color. From an aesthetic point of view it is as attractive as a jail for zoo animals.

In their 1987 report, the organization Amnesty International condemned the conditions at Marion saying:

In Marion, violations of the Minimum Standard Rules [of the United Nations for the treatment of prisoners] are common...There is almost no rule in the Minimum Standard Rules that is not broken in one form or another...

Carlos Alberto Torres

The 1990 report by the House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property and the Administration of Justice expresses " concern[...] about the amount of time that the prisoners spend in their cells in relative isolation and the limited opportunities for productive activity and recreation available in a highly controlled environment." And the necessity to "continue developing a more humane focus for the imprisonment of prisoners in a maximum security prison."

From 1986 to 1988 Alejandrina Torres was put in a Maximum Security Unit for women in Lexington, KY. Acknowledging the ideological character of the assignment to this unit, a federal judge stated in Baraldini v Meese:

One thing is to place persons under greater security because they have histories of escape attempts and pose special risks for our correctional facilities. But consigning anyone to a high security unit for past political associations which they will never shed unless forced to renounce them is a dangerous mission for this country's prison system to continue.

Amnesty International concluded in 1988 that the conditions and diet in this unit were "deliberately and gratuitously oppressive."

The UNSMRTP states clearly that prisoners should be allowed to communicate with their family and friends, including visits, and that "prison personnel should be responsible for assuring and improving [the relations of] prisoners" with their families. Federal regulations and the U.S. Prison Board Rules repeat the same thing (28 CFR Sec.540.40). Nevertheless Oscar López Rivera was not permitted any visit that involved physical contact. Some of the prisoners have to submit to a search before and after visits by their families even though they only

Ricardo Jiménez

see them through a glass window and speak to them by telephone. Some of the prisoners are restricted to visits by their immediate family members. While Alejandrina Torres was in Lexington her son-in-law and grandchildren were not included in this definition of immediate family used by the prison authorities. Carlos Alberto Torres, Haydeé Torres, Ida Luz Rodríguez and Alejandrina Torres have suffered through periods from months to years where communication with anyone outside of their immediate family has been prohibited. Many requests for visits by different friends have been denied and political literature has been censored.

In the United States common prisoners are allowed to visit an immediate family member who is dying or to attend his or her funeral. This gesture of decency has been denied the Puerto Rican Political Prisoners. When Carmen Valentín's father died, she was not allowed to attend the funeral, even though her family was willing to pay all the expenses of the trip. Ricardo Jiménez' mother died without having seen him after having endured cancer for two years which prevented her from visiting him in prison. Elizam Escobar could not visit his father while he was sick nor was he allowed to attend his funeral.

Why Should You Join the Campaign for the Freedom of the Puerto Rican Political Prisoners?

As responsible people, concerned with the situation in our community, in our country and in other countries in the world, we have lifted our voices to protest many problems and injustices. We have protested the U.S. military interventions throughout the world; we have demanded a stop to the clear cutting of our forests; we have demanded adequate health services for those who have AIDS; we have fought against pollution in our communities; we have fought for a sound education for our children; and we have protested against racism. Also we have written letters or sent telegrams to foreign governments in support of people jailed unjustly, and protested human rights violations.

The president of the United States has the constitutional power to unconditionally pardon the Puerto Rican political prisoners. The power that the Constitution gives him to pardon people who have acted or conspired against the U.S. government has been used in the past to pardon, among others, confederate soldiers who were charged with treason during the Civil War, socialists charged with organizing armed resistance to the draft during the First Word War, and the five Puerto Rican nationalists who were charged with shooting at the

cles on art and politics have been published in magazines in Canada, England, Italy, Latin America and the United States. He is considered to be one of the most important Puerto Rican revolutionary painters and poets. His release date is 2014.

ALBERTO RODRIGUÉZ

Alberto Rodriguéz

Alberto was born in 1953 in the Bronx, New York and was raised in Chicago. While he was in high school he became part of a new generation of Puerto Ricans in the United States who demanded that their history and culture be recognized and he joined the national liberation struggle. He became part of a group of Latino students who, using the tactics of sit-ins and civil disobedience, forced the Chicago Board of Education to be more responsive to the needs of Latino students. Alberto entered the University of Illinois in 1972, and immediately became involved in student struggles for a Latin American studies program and for recruitment of Latino students. Upon graduation in 1976 he began to work for community programs which provided opportunities for working adults to pursue educational goals. He also worked in various community organizations such as the Workers Rights Center, El Comité Pro-Orientación Comunal, El Desfile del Pueblo, Latino Cultural Center and various anti-repression committees. He has two children, Yazmín and Ricardo.

When arrested in 1983 Alberto was working as an academic counselor at Northeastern Illinois University and was completing his thesis requirements for a graduate degree from Governor's State University. He was convicted of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to 35 years. His first ten months in prison were in solitary confinement, where, he says, "I had to search within myself to find the spiritual strength to persevere." His release date is 2004.

ALEJANDRINA TORRES

Alejandrina was born in Puerto Rico in 1939. Her family emigrated to the United States when she was 11 years old. During the 1960's and 70's, she was a leader in her community. She was a founding member and later a teacher at the Puerto Rican High School in Chicago. She later helped found the Betances Health Clinic and was active in boycotts of public schools which continued to mis-educate children and were hostile and racist to their parents. At the First Congregational Church, where she worked, she organized a variety of community programs. She also participated in the Committee to Free the Five Nationalists and later became a member of the Committee to Free the Puerto Rican Prisoners of War.

At the time of her arrest in 1983 she was married to Reverend José A. Torres and had two daughters Liza and Catalina, who were 16 and 11 years old respectively. She was accused of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to 35 years in prison. Her release date is 2004.

Since her imprisonment, Alejandrina Torres has been plagued by health problems which were aggravated by prison staff's violent attacks and an indifference

to her medical needs. It took the federal prison system six years to place her in a regular women's prison. Two of those six years were spent in the underground Women's High Security Unit at Lexington, KY. Amnesty International has condemned the conditions in that unit as "deliberately and gratuitously oppressive" and as causing physical and psychological deterioration.

Throughout her more than ten years of imprisonment she has maintained a positive attitude and works with prisoners assisting them in achieving educational, vocational, and religious goals. Her faith in God and in her people has maintained her high spirits. "In the darkest place they put me in, I always manage to see a glimmer of hope. Taking on the struggle for justice is a matter of the heart and the conscience," she recently told the editor of the United Church of Christ national newsletter.

RICARDO JIMENEZ

Ricardo was born in Puerto Rico in 1956. His family moved to the U.S. when he was still an infant. He attended Tuley High School in Chicago when the school was in the midst of a crisis brought about by a racist principal and the lack of a relevant curriculum for Puerto Rican students. As a member of Aspira and the student council he was a leader in struggles which ultimately led to the creation of the Roberto Clemente High School. Ricardo was also Vice President of the Senior Class, a member of the national Honor Society and in 1974 was chosen by the mayor as the city of Chicago's Senior High School Student of the Year.

In his community Ricardo worked as a volunteer at El Rancor, a drug rehabilitation Center, and on a project on housing which led to the exposure of a plan called the Chicago 21 plan, to turn the Puerto Rican community into an enclave for the high income professional class. Upon graduation he attended Loyola University and was a member of the Latin American Student Organization, which developed the university's first Puerto Rican history class. He later attended Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago and was selected to represent the student body in a national conference on the need to force large U.S. corporations to open their doors to Latino engineers and other high tech professionals.

Ricardo was arrested in 1980, accused of seditious conspiracy and related charges, and sentenced to 98 years. In prison, he gravitated to educational programs, both as a student and as a tutor for other students. He has volunteered teaching illiterate and functionally illiterate prisoners to read and write.

CARMEN VALENTÍN

Carmen was born in Puerto Rico in 1946 and emigrated with her family to the U.S. when she was 10 years old. She received a BA. from Northeastern Illinois University, a MA from Roosevelt University, and at the time of her arrest was completing her Doctorate from the University. Carmen became active in the community as a young teacher at Tuley High School, where she struggled against racism and an educational curriculum based on ignorance of the Puerto Rican reality, outright lies and distortions. She took her role as educator seriously and refused to compromise her principles with the Board of Education's

awarded the Bronze Star. When he returned from the war in 1967, he found that drugs, unemployment, housing, health care and education in the Puerto Rican community had reached dire levels and immediately set to work organizing to improve the quality of life for his people. Oscar worked in the creation of both the Puerto Rican High School and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. He was involved in the struggle for bilingual education in public schools and to force universities to actively recruit Latino students, staff, and faculty. He also worked on ending discrimination in public utilities like Illinois Bell, People's Gas, and Commonwealth Edison. He was arrested in 1981 and sentenced to 55 years for seditious conspiracy. In 1988 he was given an additional 15 years for conspiracy to escape. Oscar is in prison in the maximum security jail in Marion, Illinois under oppressive conditions. His release date is 2021.

DYLCIA PAGÁN

Dylcia was born in New York in 1946. At an early age she became involved in the civil rights movement, participating in voter registration drives. As a student at Brooklyn College she helped organize the Puerto Rican Student Union which resulted in the formulation of a student-controlled Puerto Rican Studies Department. By the early 1970's, she began a career as a TV producer and writer developing investigative documentaries and children's programs at NBC, ABC, CBS, and PBS. She worked with the Puerto Rican Media and Education Council, which filed a series of lawsuits against the major television stations which facilitated the local public affairs programming that still exists today. She also worked as the English editor of the bilingual daily, El Tiempo.

Dylcia was arrested in 1980 and charged with seditious conspiracy and related charges and sentenced to 63 years. When she was arrested in 1980, her young child, whose safety she feared for, was hidden from the government. In the prison she has developed educational and cultural programs for the other inmates, has taught aerobics, directed theatrical performances, and organized carnivals for Children's Day.

ADOLFO MATOS

Adolfo was born in Puerto Rico in 1950. At the age of 15, he moved from his native Lajas to New York City to live with his grandparents. He has two daughters, Rosa María and Lydia. He was arrested in 1980 and is serving a 78 year sentence for conspiracy and related charges. His family lives in New York and Puerto Rico and rarely can afford the expenses of visiting him in California, where he has been held over the last few years. He has become an artisan in prison, producing copper etchings of Puerto Rican scenery and historical figures.

ALICIA RODRÍGUEZ

Alicia was born in Chicago in 1953, the first in her family to be born in the United States. On entering school, Alicia quickly discovered that being born in the U.S. brought her no privileges, as her Puerto Rican parents, heritage, language, and culture were regarded as foreign, different, and ugly by her teachers

and fellow students. Her first trip to Puerto Rico, which came only after graduating high school, was a turning point in her life. On her third and last trip, as a biology student at the University of Illinois in Chicago, Alicia was heartbroken to see the devastating effects of industrial pollution on the island and resolved to combat the root of the problem -colonialism. She was arrested in 1980, convicted of seditious conspiracy and related charges, and sentenced to 85 years in prison. Her sister is Ida Luz Rodríguez. Although she is one of the longest held prisoners in the prison, with an immaculate record which includes the accumulation of a bachelors degree with honors, after 13 years she is not permitted to walk unescorted across the grounds.

IDA LUZ RODRÍGUEZ

Alicia Rodríguez

Ida Luz was born in Puerto Rico in 1950. She studied at the University of Illinois in Chicago, majoring in psychology and sociology. She participated in community struggles for jobs, housing, and education, and worked at a hospital in the Puerto Rican community that blatantly discriminated against the very community it served. She worked at the Puerto Rican High School and with the Committee to Free the Five Nationalists. Her son Damián is 22 years old. Her sister is Alicia Rodríguez. Ida was arrested in 1980 and sentenced to 83 years in prison for seditious conspiracy and related charges. In prison she has finished her bachelor's degree and continues studying psychology, health and environmental questions. Her release date is 2014.

Final Word

Puerto Rican Nationalists Oscar Collazo, Lolita Lebrón, Irving Flores, Andrés Figueroa Cordero, and Rafael Cancel Miranda spent between 25 and 29 years in U.S. jails for their activities in support of Puerto Rico,s independence and self-determination until they were pardoned by president Jimmy Carter. It is urgent that we join efforts so that the same thing will not happen to the political prisoners and prisoners of war who today find themselves serving sentences in U.S. jails. No one better to underline the importance of this campaign than Yazmin Rodríguez and Noemí Cortés, daughters of Alberto Rodríguez and Edwin Cortés:

We miss our fathers. And even though we have grown up without them, we love them very much. Nobody can take their place in our hearts, no matter what is said about them. They have earned and will always have our respect. We forgave them for leaving us and will wait with hope and admiration for their return. Unfortunately, we are not the only children without parents. There are many others who have parents in jail for this cause. We hope that people will understand our hardships and help us in our struggle for their release...

They speak with the voices of all the children who await the day of their mother or/and father's release.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Join ProLIBERTAD.

2. Organize a ProLIBERTAD Committee in your community, church or workplace.

3. Participate in activities in support of the prisoners; write to President and Mrs. Clinton demanding their freedom; sign petitions demanding their freedom; ask friends and family members to do the same.

4. Organize activities, conferences, or panel discussions on the prisoners in your community, church, school, or workplace.

5. Write articles or letters to newspapers, magazines, local bulletins, etc. or if you know somebody or have a relationship with a publication interested in publishing an article on this theme, communicate with ProLibertad and someone from our work group will write an article.

6. Support ProLIBERTAD with money. Write a check to USPRSN (ProLIBERTAD Campaign), Mail to ProLIBERTAD, PO Box 477, New York, NY 10159-0477

7. Write or call ProLIBERTAD:

New York: ProLIBERTAD PO Box 477, New York, NY 10159-0477
Telephone: (718) 601-4751 Fax (718) 601-3909.

Boston, MA: Latinos por el Cambio Social c/o Central America Education Fund, 1151 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02130. Telephone: (617) 492-0699.

Amherst, MA: Max Dueñas, 10 Hollister Apts., Hadley Rd., Amherst, MA 01002. Telephone: (413) 256-4578.

Washington, DC: Comité Independentista Puertorriqueño del Area de Washington. Contacts: José Vargas: (703) 243-4969 or Nitza Segui: (202) 265-9678

1. The information contained in this document have been taken from different brochures and articles including material published by Jan Susler, Ofensiva '92, the National Committee for the Freedom of the Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, the Alberto Rodriguez Support Committee, Que Ondee Sola, Claridad and the Puerto Rico Update, newsletter of the US/Puerto Rico Solidarity Network.
2. Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1989 State of the Bureau of Prisons (Washington, DC) pg. 54.
3. Id., pg 55.
4. James Ridge way, "Hard Time: Why the Left Goes to Jail and the Right Goes Home," The Village Voice, December 11, 1980.
5. Paul Valentine "Md Klan Leader Gets 36 Months in Weapons Case," The Washington Post, 10/5/89; "Md Ku Klux Klan Leader Sentenced," The Washington Post, 10/10/89.
6. National Abortion Federation, Antiabortion Violence: Incidents of Arsons, Bombings and Attempts, 1977-1985, (1986) pgs . 1 and 5.
7. U.S. v. Michael Donald Bray, (D.C. Md) Crim. H-85-082, Transcript of sentencing hearing, July 2, 1985 pg. 19; Sue Ann Pressley, "From Prison Back to P.G. Pulpit," The Washington Post, July 26, 1989.

and in the anti-mining crusades and the land rescue movement in Puerto Rico. In 1985 he was arrested for conspiring to "overthrow the U.S. government in Puerto Rico" and to obtain money from the Wells Fargo company, insured by the United States government, to continue the independence struggle in Puerto Rico. He is serving a 60 year sentence in Atlanta, GA.

ANTONIO CAMACHO NEGRÓN

Antonio was born in Yauco, Puerto Rico in 1945. Antonio, whose family has for generations lived in the coffee-growing region of Yauco, was a farmer. He also studied psychology at the University of Puerto Rico and two years of law at the Interamericana University. He worked as a therapist with the Department of Services against Addiction, Methadone Program. At the time of his arrest in 1986 he was working as a mechanic and was the sole source of income for his family. He was sentenced to 15 years for allegedly participating in a conspiracy in general and interstate transportation of money in the robbery of the Wells Fargo Company in Hartford, Connecticut. Antonio has four children, three boys and a girl, who live in Puerto Rico. He is incarcerated in Pennsylvania, thousands of miles away from his children and family.

LUIS ROSA

Luis was born in Chicago in 1960. At the time of his arrest he was 19 years old and was a young father and a university student. He was also an excellent baseball player, recruited by professional teams. At the University of Illinois he became involved in the student movement and was president of the Union for Puerto Rican Students. In the community he was particularly involved in the struggle against police brutality. Luis was involved in the campaign against police murders of unarmed Puerto Ricans which arose in response to the killings of Cruz and Osorio in Humboldt Park in 1977 by the Chicago police. He was an organizer for the Desfile del Pueblo Puertorriqueño and at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. In 1980 he was arrested, charged with seditious conspiracy and related charges, and sentenced to 105 years.

Luis Rosa

In prison Luis has kept a youthful and enthusiastic spirit. He has continued to be involved in sports, educational and cultural activities. His spotless record has not prevented the state system from shuttling him mercilessly between maximum security prisons, or from one cell to another within a prison, or from limiting his access to educational and other programs available to other prisoners.

OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA

Oscar was born in Puerto Rico in 1943. His family moved to the U.S. when he was nine years old. He was drafted into the army and served in Viet Nam and

demands that she ignore the colonial plight of her people. Her educational presentations became controversial, and she was forced to resign.

Carmen then began to work at the Central YMCA Community College. Carmen sponsored both the Iranian Student Association and the Organization of Arab Students during an intense period of struggle and controversy which led to many physical confrontations with the local police as well as with the Shah's secret police. In the community she worked to defeat the infamous Chicago 21 Plan. She was a founding member and president of the José de Diego Bilingual Center and was on the board of directors of Aspira of Illinois. Carmen was also a founding member of the Ruiz-Belvis Educational Center and developed various educational and cultural programs for the maximum security prison for men at Stateville, IL. In 1980 she was arrested, charged with seditious conspiracy and related charges, and sentenced to 98 years. Her release date is 2043.

Her son, Antonio, who was 10 years old at the time of Carmen's arrest, has graduated from college and works in the same school where his mother taught. Carmen has a three year old grandchild.

CARLOS ALBERTO TORRES

Carlos was born in Puerto Rico in 1952. His family soon thereafter emigrated to New York and then to Chicago. Carlos grew up in his father's house, a minister with a passion for social justice. His step-mother is Alejandrina Torres. In his junior year in high school he was able to participate in his first Puerto Rican history class, offered by Aspira. He studied sociology at Southern Illinois University and later at the University of Illinois at Chicago. At the University of Illinois he became involved in the struggles against the racist teachings of Schockley, Critteneden and other sociologists, as well as for Latino recruitment to the university. Carlos was involved in issues in the community related to police brutality, slum landlords, corrupt politicians, and the colonial case of Puerto Rico. In 1980 he was arrested and charged with seditious conspiracy and related charges, and sentences to 78 years in prison. His release date is 2024.

Upon his arrest, his three year old daughter was hidden for her safety for fear that government agents would carry out threats to do her harm. In prison he has worked for many years as a baker, attended college, and taught Spanish to fellow prisoners.

JUAN SEGARRA PALMER

Juan was born in Puerto Rico in 1950. He comes from a family with a long history of resistance to both Spanish and U.S. colonialism. He graduated from Harvard University and continued studying in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He is married to ex-political prisoner Lucy Berríos and has five children: Amílcar, Ramón, Wendy, Luriza, and Zulena.

During his youth Juan did cultural work in the poor barrios of New York, in the prisons in Boston,

Juan Segarra Palmer

About the Prisoners...

EDWIN CORTÉS

Edwin was born and raised in Chicago, one of 15 children. In 1973, after a high school teacher told him that she did not teach Puerto Rican history because Puerto Rico did not have a history, he became involved in Latinos Unidos, a student group that called for the establishment of a Latin American studies curriculum and cultural programs. After graduating high school, Edwin entered the University of Illinois in Chicago where he joined a struggle that culminated in the establishment of programs for support services and recruitment for Latinos. As a student leader he participated in struggles in support of the Iranian, Palestinian, Eritrean, and Mexican people. He also participated in the founding of the Puerto Rican Student Union. In the community in which he lived he helped to set up programs for recreational and employment opportunities for youth. He was a member of the Committee to stop the Grand Jury and for the freedom of the five Puerto Rican nationalist prisoners. Edwin has two children: Noemí and Carlos. His children were two and four years old when he was arrested in 1983 and condemned to 35 years in prison for seditious conspiracy. His first ten months in custody were spent in isolation, imposed solely because of the political nature of the charges against him, and ended only when the federal court ordered the prison to place him in the general population. In prison he has been involved in the creation of cultural and social programs for prisoners. He has also been active in vocational and arts programs. His release date is 2004.

Edwin Cortéz

ELIZAM ESCOBAR

Elizam was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in 1948. He comes from a family with a long history of anti-colonial resistance. He has been active in political struggles and the pro-independence movement since the 1960's. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from the University of Puerto Rico and continued his graduate studies in New York. In New York, he worked as a teacher at the Museum del Barrio, in public schools, and as a graphic artist with the Hispanic Artists' Association. He was arrested in 1980, accused of seditious conspiracy, and sentenced to 68 years in prison.

At the time of his arrest, his son Elizer was five years old. Elizer is studying to become a musician and artist, and is taking college classes. Since the Prison Board has kept Elizam in prisons in Wisconsin and Oklahoma, his family who lives in New York and Puerto Rico can only visit him once a year.

Elizam has continued writing and painting in prison. His paintings have been exhibited in Puerto Rico, the United States, Latin America , and Europe. His arti-

Blair House in Washington, DC. in 1950 and at the U.S. Congress in 1954.

The time has come for us to publicly denounce the human rights violations committed against those Puerto Ricans who have struggled for the independence of their country and to demand their unconditional amnesty. This campaign is based in principles of justice that are important to all of us:

• Self-determination is a basic right of all people;

• The sentences imposed on the Puerto Rican political prisoners are excessive and disproportionate;

• The Puerto Rican political prisoners have been the objects of abusive prison conditions which have violated their human rights;

• The Puerto Rican political prisoners have served more time than is demanded of most prisoners, including those who have been charged with murder.

Now is the time to unite our efforts to demand their unconditional freedom!

Ida Luz Rodríguez

Many voices have cried out for the release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war already. A few examples of these voices include:

• Petitions and thousands of letters that have been sent to the president and the attorney general of the United States.

• New York's City Council and its former Mayor David Dinkins.

• Religious groups and individuals who have called for freedom such as the 19th Synod of the United Church of Christ; General Conference of the United Methodist Church; the Most Rev. Thomas J. Gumbleton, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Detroit; Right Reverend Paul Moore, Episcopal Diocese of New York; Esdras Rodríguez-Diaz, Associate General Secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race of the United Methodist Church; Cynthia Nozomi Ikuta, United Church Board of Homeland Ministries; the Ecumenical Peace Institute/CALC of Berkeley, CA; and the Northern California Ecumenical Conference of San Francisco, CA.

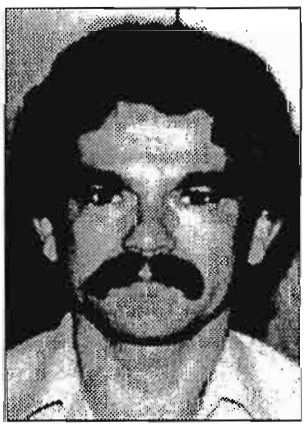
• Legal and human rights organizations who have called for freedom such as Puerto Rico's Bar Association; the president of the National Lawyers Guild; the coordinators of the National Conference of Black Lawyers; and Roger Wareham, Vice-International General Secretary, International Association against Torture

Alejandrina Torres

existence of a federal prison in Puerto Rico. Adolfo Matos is assigned to a prison in Southern California even though there is a prison very close to where his family lives in New York. Elizam Escobar has requested a transfer to a prison near to New York to be closer to his son who lives in New York City. Although hundreds of prisoners have been assigned to prisons in the New York area, Elizam has been denied a transfer on the grounds of overcrowding. Further, the political prisoners have been moved around continually to different maximum security prisons without prior warning to their families and/ or lawyers.

Some of the prisoners have been attacked sexually. For example, Alejandrina Torres was attacked by personnel in three different prisons. The first assault took place when she was locked in a men's unit, permitting the men to exhibit themselves in front of her. In a second incident a male lieutenant forced her to put her head between his knees and observed while female guards tore off her clothes and left her naked. The authorities responded to complaints by putting Alejandrina in solitary confinement, prohibiting from calling her family and lawyer to denounce the abuses. She was penalized for violating prison rules, and a secret letter was written to a judge assigned to her case giving a false version of the events. In another prison female guards held her while a male guard inserted his fingers in her vagina and her anus during a "search." The warden who ordered the search admitted later that he did not suspect Alejandrina of having contraband, and that the search was in violation of prison rules.

Even though U.S. law stipulates that prisoners should receive medical service equal to that of the standards available to the general community, the Puerto Rican political prisoners have been denied adequate medical attention. For example, Haydeé Beltrán was left sterile after prison officials refused treatment for an inflammation of the pelvis for five years, ignoring episodes of drastic weight loss and severe pains in her pelvis which did not permit her to stand up.



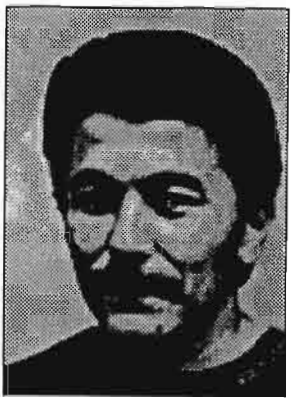
Oscar López

Some of the prisoners have been locked in an underground prison with the goal of destroying them physically, psychologically, and politically. For example, Oscar López who is in a maximum security prison in Marion, IL, wrote in 1993:

> I am enclosed in a cell that is 8 feet wide by 9 feet long on an average of 22 hours each day.

crimes. For example in 1976 Orlando Letelier, a leader in the movement against the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, and his assistant ,were assassinated by a bomb that was placed in Letelier's car which was parked in front of his residence in Washington, DC. The agent of the Chilean secret police who admitted to having placed the bomb was sentenced to 10 years in prison, of which he served 5 years and two months. A major in the Chilean army received a sentence of 7 years for his role in the assassination and a Cuban exile who admitted his role in the plot received a 12 year sentence.

A Ku Klux Klan Wizard, who was captured in a boat with an arsenal of arms and explosives while attempting to invade a Caribbean island with the goal of establishing a white supremacist state received a three year sentence and was freed on parole after two years.[3] Another Klan leader received a sentence of three years for possession of an arsenal and for conspiracy. This same man was later sentenced to three more years in prison for attempted murder and racial harassment after shooting at two black men.[4]



Adolfo Matos

Two women anti-abortion activists sentenced for conspiring in a series of Florida bombings including a doctor's office and a women's clinic, were put on probation and received a small fine. Their male co-conspirators received ten years in prison and a fine for three of the explosions, and were not tried for the fourth explosion.[5] Michael Donald Bray who was found guilty of bombing ten clinics was sentenced to ten years and was set free after serving 3.7 years.[6]

The excessive sentences imposed on Puerto Rican women and men in prison because of their political activities, make it clear that the goal is to punish them for their political activity and not for the acts that were alleged by the U.S. government at the time of their arrest.

Human Rights Violations

During their imprisonment, the Puerto Rican political prisoners have been the objects of cruel treatment and degrading and inhumane condition, because of their political beliefs. This is in direct violation of international norms which prohibit discriminatory treatment of prisoners by prison personnel based on their political beliefs or opinions. [United Nations' Minimum Uniform Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners (UNSMRTP), Rule A1 6 (1).]

Federal regulations stipulate that prisoners should be put in prisons as close as possible to their homes and families. Nevertheless the Puerto Rican political prisoners have been kept far from their families and communities in the United States and/or Puerto Rico. For example, all those arrested on August 30, 1985 in Puerto Rico have had to serve their sentences in the United States despite the

Throughout their lives they suffered the Puerto Rican colonial reality and the consequences of their political and community involvement. They were fired from their jobs, kicked out of schools and universities, denied scholarships, threatened, spied on, attacked by the police and the FBI. And when they rose u and fought against these injustices they were branded as terrorists and placed in some of the worst prisons in the U.S.

The Puerto Rico's Colonial Case

Puerto Rico has been a colony for 500 years, first of Spain and then of the United States. In 1898, at the conclusion of what is called the Spanish-American War, Spain was forced to cede the island nation to the United States pursuant t a treaty between Spain, France and the United States. No one consulted the people of Puerto Rico, in violation of a Charter of Autonomy signed by Spain and Puerto Rico which provided that the island's status could not be altered without consulting the Puerto Rican people. The U.S. military declared martial law, installed a U.S. governor, and began a program to alter and destroy the fiber of Puerto Rico. Over the years, the U.S. destroyed Puerto Rico's agrarian economy; devalued its money; imposed citizenship on its people to facilitate drafting its men into the U.S. army to fight the U.S.' wars; imposed the teaching of the English language and U.S. history on its students; polluted its air, land, and water; sterilized its women; and installed 21 U.S. military bases on some of the best land. This would sound outrageous and unbelievable, except that this is the very same U.S. government tha exposed unsuspecting citizens to radiation, as recent reports have disclosed.

Dylcia Pagán

Puerto Rico's colonial reality cannot be overlooked. George Bush admitted during his presidency that Puerto Rico's people had never been consulted on their status. Even Pedro Rosselló, the colonial governor, called attention to Puer Rico's colonial status in testimony before the United Nations in 1993.

As with any people of one nation dominated by another, there have always been Puerto Ricans who resisted the U.S. government's control of their nation's sovereignty. Their resistance, whether the mere advocacy of independence or the taking up arms against the colonizer, has been censored and criminalized, punished throughout the years by harassment, surveillance, imprisonment, and even summary execution. The examples are numerous. Some recent examples include: in 1979 two pro-independence youth were assassinated at Cerro Maravilla by the police after an under cover agent set up a trap and the Puerto Rican government participated in the cover up that ensued; in 1987 it was discovered that the Puerto Rican police in collaboration with repressive US agencies had maintained a list of so called "subversives" along with over 135,000 file

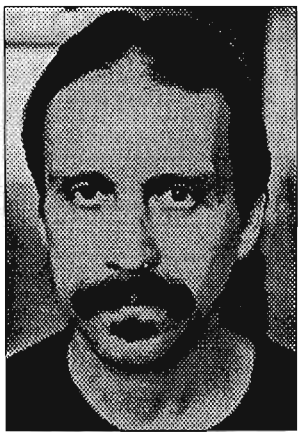
What Is ProLIBERTAD?

ProLIBERTAD's goal is the unconditional freedom of all the Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war. The work group is composed of individuals and organizations who work together on a broad and unitary basis, accepting differences of ideological or political position, but sharing the responsibility to support these Puerto Ricans who have been imprisoned for their political activities in the cause of Puerto Rico's independence and self-determination.

It is our aim to develop an educational campaign sponsoring activities, conferences, publications, and use the press, radio and television to inform the public about who the prisoners are, the circumstances of their imprisonment, and the reasons why a person, whatever his or her political beliefs, should demand their amnesty.

We are aware of the work this entails and see the need to collaborate and coordinate as much as possible with other organizations and people working for the unconditional freedom of all the Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war, as well with groups working for the freedom of African-American, Native American, Chicano and White political prisoners in the United States

Who Are the Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War?



Elizam Escobar

They are workers and professionals, students and teachers, community organizers, artists, mothers and fathers of families. And they are fighters for Puerto Rico's independence and social justice. These men and women found Puerto Rico's colonial reality intolerable and unacceptable. This situation led them to join the Puerto Rican independence movement and to confront the United States government directly. The majority of the political prisoners have spent more than a decade in federal prisons for their political activities.

During the 1970's and the beginning of the 80's, the prisoners were involved in community, union, student and political struggles in Puerto Rico and in the United States. They fought for the people's right to high quality, free education. They worked to create community institutions such as alternative education programs, child-care centers, health centers, housing cooperatives, recreational facilities and political organizations. They participated actively in churches, student groups, unions, professional associations, committees against repression, campaigns against youth violence and drugs. In summary they challenged the U.S. political system in many ways.

WRITE TO
THE POLITICAL PRISONERS
& PRISONERS OF WAR

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