

Buffalo Forum



Local Publication of the
U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

Workers of all countries, unite!

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May 26, 2017

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Puerto Rican Patriot and Internationalist Oscar López Rivera is Free

The very day that Puerto Rican patriot Oscar López Rivera completed his prison term he spoke publicly at a massive rally in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Such joy there was, in San Juan and worldwide, in seeing Oscar free at last. His indomitable spirit and commitment to the struggle for Puerto Rican independence was evident for all

to see. The 36 years he was unjustly imprisoned by the U.S., the years of solitary confinement he endured, the constant efforts to convince him to abandon his principles and denounce the struggle for independence — none of it could break this patriot and hero. On May 17 he stood

Oscar López Rivera is Free • 7

STRIKE ENDS AFTER 40 DAYS

Palestinian Hunger Strikers Oppose Trump Visit, Secure Some Demands

Remaining firm for 40 days, organizing a Day of Rage by Palestinians against Trump's visit, securing broad support that included two general strikes, the Palestinian hunger strikers brought their

conditions and unjust detention without charges to the fore and secured some of their humanitarian demands. Their determination was such that daily demonstrations of support. **Palestinian Hunger Strikers • 4**

CHICAGO HOMECOMING

Palestinian Organizer Rasmea Odeh Salutes Oscar

Rasmea Defense Committee

Rasmea Odeh is a lifelong organizer for the freedom and rights of Palestine. She was persecuted and imprisoned and tortured by the Israelis and is now being deported by the U.S. for her constant

commitment to the struggle for justice and liberation for the Palestinian people and social live for all peoples working to be free from oppression. Below is her statement to the

Rasmea Salutes Oscar • 12

Celebrate Juneteenth

Buffalo hosts one of the largest Juneteenth celebrations, honoring the struggle against slavery by the slaves themselves and the contributions of Africans and African Americans to the progress of humanity. This year it will be celebrated June 17 and 18, in Martin Luther King Park. The parade is always the highlight of the weekend events, bringing together many marching bands, drill teams, floats and more, with hundreds lining

the streets and enjoying the warm and friendly atmosphere. A variety of arts and cultural activities are also planned for the weekend and for the week preceding the parade on June 17. These include information and a tour about the Underground Railway, which was organized by blacks and whites together to secure freedom for slaves, many of them crossing over to Canada. There is also the "Git On Da Bus" tour

through the city, highlighting sites that are important to the African American experience. It includes storytelling at each site and is sponsored by the Tradition Keepers.

Juneteenth gets its name from the celebration that began on June 19, 1865, the day Major General Gordon Granger of the Union Army rode into Galveston, Texas to finally execute the Emancipation Proclamation. Thousands

flooded the streets of Galveston, rejoicing in the defeat of slavery. Juneteenth became the day to commemorate African American freedom.

Juneteenth also recognizes that even though the proclamation was issued by Lincoln on September 22, 1862, and came into affect January 1, 1863, many people remained enslaved. It was the struggle of the slaves themselves and

Celebrate Juneteenth • 3

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Junteenth Events

Festival Parade

The 42nd Juneteenth parade will be held on June 17th. It begins at Genesee Street and Moselle at 11:00am. The parade will travel on Genesee Street to Best Street into Martin Luther King Park.

Arts and Cultural Stage

The Arts and Culture Stage is located on Fillmore Avenue and E. Parade Street. The Arts and Culture Stage features many local artists. The entertainment happens from 2:00pm - 8:00pm on Saturday June 17th and 12:00pm - 8:00pm on Sunday June 18th.

Underground Railroad

Two tours will be provided on both June 17th and 18th. Tours are scheduled for 2:00pm and 4:00pm. Pickups are on Best and Fillmore Street.

"Git On Da Bus"

Saturday, June 10, 3:30-7pm, Juneteenth Festival Headquarters at 1517 Genesee Street. Sponsored by the Tradition Keepers. A journey to many important sites in the city with storytelling at each site.

Sankofa Days

June 9-16. Juneteenth uses this time to reflect on issues that affect the community.

SCHEDULE:

June 9 - Friday

Noon - The Flag Raising Ceremony: Location: Niagara Square (front of Buffalo City Hall). The Liberation Flag will be raised.

1PM - Art Exhibit & Reception, meet and greet with Warrior King @ 515 Main Street

7PM - Free Fred Brown presented by Ujima Theatre, 350 Masten Avenue

June 10 - Saturday

10AM to 2:30PM - Cultivating Classes Youth workshops in Science poetry, Music and Dance @ Buffalo Public School #74 126 Donaldson Road

3:30PM to 7PM - "Git On Da Bus" Juneteenth Festival Headquarters - 1517 Genesee Street - Meet at 3:30 p.m., Bus leaves at 4:00 p.m., returns 7:00 p.m. Sponsored by the Tradition Keepers.

7PM - Joko Benah - My Child + Your Child = Your Children stage performance/fundraiser @ Buffalo Public School #74



7PM - "Free Fred Brown" presented by Ujima Company Inc, @ Paul Roberson Theatre, 350 Masten Avenue.

June 11 - Sunday

Block Party and concert "Between A Rock & Hard Place" featuring reggae artist Warrior King - live music, food, giveaways, carpenters Union, at WUFO, 143 Broadway Avenue, Project Access to A-Free Ka live to air on 1080AM

4PM - "Free Fred Brown" presented by Ujima Company Inc. at the Paul Robeson Theatre, 350 Masten Avenue

June 12 - Monday

6PM to 8PM - African Consciousness Workshop, Frank A. Merriweather Library Jefferson and Utica: Focus on 21st Century Africa

June 13 - Tuesday

6PM to 8PM - Getting Well Soon (mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially)- at the Main Street Gallery, 515 Main Street with Key Bank, the Black Social Workers of WNY, and the African American Heritage Co-Op

June 14 - Wednesday

6PM to 8PM - Mortgage Seminar presented by Key Bank @ Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church, 641 Masten Avenue

June 15 - Thursday

6PM to 8PM - Conscious Café Poetry Spoken Word open Mic hosted by PaulaDia at the Em Tea Coffee Cup 80 Oakgrove Avenue. Tribute to Smoother Lonnie B aka Love Doctor

June 16 - Friday

6PM to 8PM - Praise and Worship in Martin Luther King Jr. Park (Best and Fillmore near MLK Jr. Bust) w/Sister Anita Williams.

What Would A Serious Discussion on Reparations Look Like?

Bruce A. Dixon, *Black Agenda Report*

Just what would a constructive and useful discussion of reparations for the descendants of Africans enslaved in the U.S. look like? The fundamental justice of the reparations proposition seems indisputable. Grievous harm was done to millions in the course of slavery, Jim Crow, the urban ghettos and the current neoliberal prison state. In slavery alone, the vast sums of capital generated by stolen labor on stolen land were essential to the building of 19th and 20th century U.S. capitalism and the U.S. rise to global economic prominence. Surely victimized and exploited deserve to be made whole.

Bringing reparations for tens of millions from idea to reality however would mean reallocation of resources on a vast scale. Broadly defining politics as the methods and institutions human beings devise to conduct our collective affairs, making reparations actually happen is a huge political project requiring the support of significant constituencies other than African Americans.

But as Adolph Reed pointed out back in 2002, some advocates of reparations, ... seemingly cannot be bothered with the task of coming up with even the sketchiest plans, roadmaps, strategies to actually win the reparations they say they want and that we all need. [...]

In a January 2016 interview on KPFA Reed extends the interrogation of reparations and the class politics of reparations.

Many eschew class analysis and hold that race, that white supremacy and systemic racial injustice explain the past and present, and that ultimately only reparations can cure these. Reed holds that reparations alone are not an answer to the politics of class. They are preferred by a very specific sector — the black misleadership — which has always positioned itself as brokers and spokespeople for the rest of us, and the administrators of any and all race based patronage, spoils, affirmative action, minority set-asides and the like.

For the vast majority of African Americans, free college education, millions of new jobs, a living wage, universal health care (instead of Obamacare's universal private insurance) and rolling back the prison state are great things and absolutely welcome whether or not they are labeled "reparations."

Reed also questions the frequently heard reparations argument that since slavery, Jim Crow and the rest were racially specific that they can only be dealt with by racially specific remedies. One can point to the



U.S. prison state erected since 1970, which houses the largest number of incarcerated people of any nation in history. The fact is that millions, disproportionately black and brown have been imprisoned without a single racially specific statute or administrative rule. So if reparations will not come forward with specific plans to win reparations, why not have jobs programs and other redistributive policies fought for and won without calling it "reparations?"

The questions that Reed raises would be the basis for a serious discussion of reparations if such a discussion ever happens. In a media campaign [like that of the presidential

Discussion on Reparations • 4

I • CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH

all those who joined the fight, that won the war and ended chattel slavery.

In celebrating Juneteenth today, the struggle against today's forms of slavery, including the slave labor of prisoners, remain battles to be won. Like slavery itself, mass incarceration in general is a means to suppress the struggles of the people for their rights. It also serves as a form of genocide against African Americans and a mechanism to block their participation in the political life of the country. Hunger strikes by prisoners, whether here in the U.S. or those of Palestinian prisoners, are a means to influence political affairs, bringing the rights of prisoners as human beings front and center. It is a means to say a society

that incarcerates so many of its youth and minorities and treats them as slaves is unfit for human beings.

Juneteenth is also a time when the issue of reparations for the crime of slavery and the many crimes since — like the government organized terror of the KKK and lynchings, Jim Crow laws, government imposed segregation and continuing inequality — is raised. Reparations by government and the monopolies whose wealth is founded on slavery, is an important part of repairing the damage caused and providing a means to go forward today. Reparations can be in the form of money paid, or debts canceled, or land, or various other means. What is significant is not simply taking the stand for

reparations, but organizing discussion about its role and the means to accomplish it. One thing for certain, it requires a new direction for political affairs, a direction where we, the people decide.

History, including the history of slavery, begins from the present, from what is being revealed today about the issues of slavery, including the wage slavery of workers, about inequality, and the continuing role of the U.S. state in maintaining them rather than eliminating them. The past is looked at for purposes of informing the present so as to secure a bright future. That bright future requires building the new, new political institutions, a democracy of our own making where we together decide.

I • PALESTINIAN HUNGER STRIKERS

port took place in Palestine and refugee camps across the Middle East. Numerous rallies and marches also took place in the U.S. and many cities worldwide. The just cause of the prisoners and their unified resistance provided an example that inspired many and garnered broad support for the collective rights of Palestinians — to their homeland, to self-determination.

The strike also succeeded in securing some of the humanitarian demands of the prisoners, including additional and longer family visits, visits by external doctors, public telephone, increasing the quantities of meat, fruit and vegetables and more (see page 4).

The Day of Rage was organized to make it clear that Trump was not welcome in Palestine. While Trump has said securing peace between Israel and



Palestine would be the “ultimate deal,” he also emphasized continued U.S. support for Israel, which includes billions in funding and arms from the U.S. and political backing. The U.S., responsible for the many crimes carried out against Gaza and Palestine as a whole, cannot secure a just peace. And given the recent massive arms

deal with Saudi Arabia to fuel its continued war against Yemen, and further build up of troops against Syria, it is evident the U.S. wants chaos and war, not peace in the region.

The Palestinian prisoners made clear their commitment to continuing forward the struggle for the rights of prisoners and the collective rights of all Palestinians. They are not looking to Trump, they are looking to and mobilizing the unified efforts of Palestinians and the support of the world’s peoples. Buffalo Forum salutes their achievements with the hunger strikes and joins all those worldwide in demanding: *End U.S. Funding of Israel! End the Occupation Now! Free All Political Prisoners!*



3 • DISCUSSION ON REPARATIONS

elections] serious and constructive discussions are not even supposed to happen.

Serious discussions about reparations will ask whether the heavy political lifting required can be accomplished at all under that name, and if it can, what it would look like. Serious discussion on reparations would take account of its class content and class differentiation among blacks, rather than ignoring it in favor of the fake racial solidarity that allowed the development of the black misleadership over the last

hundred years since Booker T.

The only place this kind of serious study, discussion and examination will take place will be the spaces we claim and create to examine our history, our failures and successes, and the work ahead. The January 8-10 Philly conference on the Black Radical Tradition was one such space. We must and we will create more like it.

Those critical examinations will take place in our public and private meetings and study groups, in churches and union

halls and bars, in classrooms, in basketball courts, on back porches, in rec centers and in bedrooms. The people will have to organize and lead those discussions ourselves. We will have to do it without any help from the media, without grants from funders of the nonprofit sector, and without exclusive dependence on corporate social media.

(Bruce A. Dixon is managing editor at Black Agenda Repor and co-chair of the Georgia Green Party.)

VICTORY, TOWARDS LIBERATION

Salute to the Palestinian Prisoners and the Struggle for Freedom

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network

After 40 days of hunger strike, Palestinian prisoners have suspended their strike and announced that they have achieved victory in their humanitarian demands, following 20 hours of negotiations between the strikers' leadership and Israeli occupation prison administration. An official press conference and announcement of the details is scheduled to take place Saturday, May 27.

On the occasion of the end of the Strike of Freedom and Dignity, the valiant battle of Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli jails, confronting the occupier with their bodies and their lives, we salute the Palestinian prisoners on achieving their victory, not only for themselves and their families, but for the entire Palestinian people and global movement for justice and liberation. We salute and congratulate the prisoners after 40 days of sacrifice, steadfastness and endless struggle. We also salute and congratulate all those who contributed to this success, throughout Palestine, in the refugee camps, in Palestinian communities everywhere and among strugglers around the world for justice and liberation. We simultaneously take this moment as an inspiration to continue and elevate our action and organizing for freedom – for all Palestinian prisoners and for the land and people of Palestine.

On April 17, Palestinian Prisoners' Day, 1500 Palestinian prisoners out of nearly 6500 imprisoned in Israeli jails launched their strike for a series of demands. These demands were straightforward, focusing on the restoration of family visits, the right to education, access to media and health care and the end of administrative detention without charges. Among the accomplishments of the strike is the restoration of the second



monthly family visit, cancelled last year by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) under the pretext of budget cuts, despite Palestinian pledges from at least August 2016 to cover the costs of the second monthly visit for Palestinian prisoners.

It is appalling that it should take a 40-day mass hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners to restore family visits taken away by an international agency that should be motivated by the rights and well-being of the prisoners. Far from a neutral bystander, the ICRC was in fact a party to this strike and a participant in the confiscation of the rights of Palestinian prisoners. This raises once again sharp questions about what really provoked the cut in family visits for Palestinian prisoners and the level of Israeli involvement in what was claimed at the time to be a mere financial decision, despite Palestinian pledges to cover costs.

While further information about the agreement has not yet been released, news indicates that further achievements of the strike also center on the issue of family visits, including access to more relatives including grandparents and grandchildren; improved communication, especially between imprisoned children and women and their families, and the installation of public telephones; easing security prohibitions and the frequent bans on family visits imposed by the Israeli prison

administration. Al-Mayadeen TV reported further aspects of the agreement:

- periodic entry of private external physicians to examine ill prisoners
- allowing visits from family members of the “second class,” including grandparents and grandchildren
- increasing the amount prisoners may have in their canteen accounts (for use in the prison store, where nearly all necessities of life must be

purchased from Israeli corporations)

- adding 3 satellite channels to the prisoners' TV access
- transferring the Ramla prison hospital to the old section which includes several rooms and a recreation area
- installation of a public telephone for women prisoners, child prisoners and ill prisoners to communicate on a daily basis with their family members
- family visits to be increased to 60 minutes from 45 minutes
- photographs with parents once annually
- increasing the quantities of meat, vegetables and fruits for prisoners
- allowing the introduction of clothing such as trousers and bags
- providing each prisoner with 1 liter olive oil, 1 kilo coffee, 1/2 kilo baklava and 1/2 kilo za'atar. [...]

Throughout the strike, the prisoners faced harsh repression. They were denied legal visits, family visits, beset by repressive raids, their belongings confiscated – even the salt that they relied on with water to preserve their life and health. Through it all, their steadfastness was an example of commitment and dedication to carry through their struggle. They were not alone in their steadfastness. The mothers and the families of the prisoners filled the tents of solidarity and support

Salute Palestinian Prisoners • 6

5 • SALUTE PALESTINIAN PRISONERS

in every city, town, village and refugee camp in Palestine. Many prisoners' mothers launched their own hunger strikes; they struggled, suffered, resisted and led alongside their children. Martyrs fell on the streets of Palestine as they protested and struggled for the liberation of their beloved prisoners at the hands of the occupation forces.

The Palestinian prisoners made clear through the Strike of Dignity and Freedom the power of Palestinian unity. The imprisoned leadership of all Palestinian trends stood together to confront the occupier, while that unity was felt in struggle, on the streets and inside prison walls – and the effects of that unity have been felt in the achievements of the prisoners.

The hunger strikers demanded that the Israeli occupation speak with their chosen leadership and defeated all attempts to circumvent the prisoners' direction, leadership and choices. [...]

Fundamentally, the Palestinian prisoners' movement is and remains a voice and a power of resistance that continues to confront the occupier on a daily basis. This strike was not only about family visits, medical care and basic human rights; fundamentally, it was an assertion of Palestinian resistance, rejection of the occupier, and power to struggle, not only for specific demands, but for freedom, return and liberation.

The strike came as U.S. President Donald Trump visited the region, in cahoots with the Zionist movement, the Israeli state and the most reactionary Arab regimes in order to peddle weaponry, death and a so-called "grand bargain" designed to liquidate the Palestinian people's struggle after 100 years of colonization, 70 years of Nakba and 50 years of intensified occupation. From within Israeli prisons, the strikers' power and its reflection and resonance on Palestinian, Arab and international streets came to confront any and all such attempts to destroy Palestinian rights and push an apartheid "solution" of



NYC Rally in support of Palestinian hunger strikers: Resistance Until Return

endless colonization. It made clear where the Palestinian people stand – with the prisoners, with the resistance and their imprisoned leadership. [...]

Throughout Palestine, in the refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, everywhere around the world in exile and diaspora, it was clear that the Palestinian people were side by side with the prisoners' movement in this strike. The prisoners' struggle helped to build and energize Palestinian community organizing internationally to support the strike and demand freedom for the prisoners.

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network salutes all of the Palestinian community organizers, international political parties, global labor organizations, Palestine solidarity movements, women's organizations, and strugglers for justice who organized hundreds of events in cities in every continent of the world, demonstrating again and again, developing creative protest mechanisms, taking the #SaltWaterChallenge, organizing one-day hunger strikes and building strength to support the Palestinian prisoners' struggle. Historically the Palestinian prisoners have always emphasized the importance of international solidarity and support for their struggle for liberation. Every one of these groups and individuals who have taken action around the world has a part in this collective struggle. [...]

Palestinian prisoners celebrated the news of Puerto Rican struggler Oscar Lopez Rivera's release from U.S. colonial

prisons and rejoiced in the scene of his homecoming alongside former Palestinian prisoner and community leader Rasmea Odeh.

The Palestinian prisoners' movement and their struggle also further empowered and inspired campaigns for boycott, divestment and sanctions – from the establishment of Hewlett-Packard (HP)-free zones in labor unions and community institutions to the inspiration of local boycott campaigns and initiatives, focusing on G4S, HP, academic and cultural boycotts. [...]

On this occasion of the prisoners' victory, we know that there is a long struggle to come, for liberation for the prisoners and liberation for Palestine. We urge all of the Palestinian communities, supporters of Palestine and social justice organizers who took to the streets, drank salt water, engaged in hunger strikes, expressed their solidarity and organized across borders and walls to celebrate the victory of the prisoners with events and actions on 4-6 June, in Celebrations of Dignity and Victory.

In these celebrations, we will recognize the power of the Palestinian people to defeat the occupier and the colonizer, honor the prisoners and their steadfastness, and emphasize the ongoing struggle. These celebrations are an occasion to escalate our demands for Palestinian freedom – for the liberation of Palestinian prisoners, the Palestinian people, and the entire land of Palestine.

Visit our website: usmlo.org

THE FREEDOM OF OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA

A Decolonizing Experience

Ana M. López, NiLP Network, May 25, 2017

It is one thing to speak about a national hero of Puerto Rico, and another to have him by your side to receive a revolutionary embrace. That, my people, is our Oscar López Rivera!

After attending Oscar's welcoming event in Puerto Rico at the end of his house arrest, celebrating his freedom from U.S. gulags for almost 36 years, I needed to feel and see the patriotic fervor of our people to transmit it in this writing. It is a decolonizing experience that sends a patriotic injection straight to our hearts and minds.

Then I needed to write a critical point of view why some of these corporate sponsors of the National Puerto Rican Parade have

decided to drop their support of this 60th anniversary of the parade on 5th Avenue. I can see clearly the parallels here in how the unjust Fiscal Control Board (imposed in an undemocratic way by the U.S. on Puerto Rico) is imposing austerity measures and is torturing Puerto Rico by the shameful arrogance of these ex-sponsors.

These corporate entities want to impose their will on the National Puerto Rican Parade board, twist their arms, impose an economic embargo, but this board has a smart conscience that is principled and patriotic and committed to servicing and empowering the Puerto Rican people and its diaspora. We cannot allow corporate

sponsors to intimidate and dictate policy to Puerto Rican institutions that have emerged from the people and community struggles. There is a total disregard that many of these corporate donations were geared for student scholarships. Who are they hurting? Students!

But we believe that there is a purposeful force, call it the FBI, U.S. imperialism, behind this attempt to smear the stature of Oscar López Rivera and his importance to the Puerto Rican Nation, Latin America, and its allies. The media and corporate entities smears are based on misinformation and factual inaccuracy about Oscar. We know

Decolonizing Experience • 8

I • Oscar López Rivera is Free

proud and firm, calling for the unity of all to win independence. He also denounced the U.S. imposed Control Board that is brutally attacking the people, demanding yet more cuts in the name of paying debts. Oscar urged all to refuse to pay the debts. "No solution coming out of the Fiscal Control Board is good for the people," he said.

His internationalism also shown bright, as he denounced the continued incarceration of many other political prisoners, including African American Mumia Abu Jamal, and Native American Leonard Peltier and supported the Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike. He expressed his unity with the struggles of the Cubans and Venezuelans against U.S. interference and his support of people's worldwide fighting for justice.

Speaking at a mass rally in Chicago the following day and elsewhere, Oscar emphasized the need to give expression to the love of the homeland by uniting to end colonization: "I believe in unity. I believe we can create a broad tent where all of us who love our homeland can fit, because we need to love our homeland in order to make Puerto Rico the nation that it has the potential of being," (telesurtv.net, May 21).

Buffalo Forum joins with all those celebrating the achievement of Oscar's freedom and sends its warmest greetings



and congratulations to Oscar, his family and legal team, the many other patriots who faced similar imprisonment and most importantly to the Puerto Rican people's movements for the liberation of political prisoners and their self-determination. We demand the U.S. end its crime of colonization, beginning by removing all its military and police forces and providing reparations. The difficulties Puerto Ricans face today stem from colonialism and it is the U.S. that owes the debts, not Puerto Ricans.

We also take this opportunity to salute another Puerto Rican patriot and internationalist, the late Dr. Luis Nieves Falcón. He and the Puerto Rican Committee for Human Rights he organized fought and organized tirelessly for the freedom of the Puerto Rican political prisoners, including

visiting them and rallying broad support for them. Dr. Nieves Falcón and the committee contributed greatly to popularizing their cause and to uniting and mobilizing all sectors of Puerto Rico for their freedom and for national independence, most vividly shown in the historic march of 100,000 people in San Juan on August 29, 1999. It is the foundations laid by this work that made Oscar's freedom possible.

As Oscar himself is demonstrating, his freedom is an important accomplishment in a struggle that continues for the independence of Puerto Rico and right of Puerto Ricans to decide their own affairs. Now is the time to step up the struggle against U.S. colonialism, demanding an end to the Control Board, cancel the debt and removal of all U.S. troops.

Board of National Puerto Rican Day Parade Responds to Oscar López Rivera Controversy

Latino Rebels, May 23, 2017

In response to announcements that some groups will not participate in the June 11, 2017 National Puerto Rican Day Parade because Oscar López Rivera will be honored, the parade's board of directors issued the following statement the morning of May 22:

"The NYPD Patrolmen's Benevolent Association's (PBA) issued a statement deciding not to participate in the largest celebration of Puerto Rican diversity in its 60th Anniversary because we are honoring Oscar López Rivera. This statement was confusing and incomprehensible, since they have not joined the Parade as a contingent ever. NYPD has and we urge them to do so this year.

"Over the years, several New York City parades have honored leaders who elicit mixed reaction. We all remember the St. Patrick's Day Parade of 1983, when IRA leader, Michael Flannery of Queens, was

chosen as Grand Marshal of the event. Although public opinion was divided, New York went ahead and celebrated Irish heritage. We all worked through the LGBT controversy of 1990, and the differences that arose with the Fire Department of New York in 2007. During these crucial times, the Big Apple's Irish American community, organized advocacy groups, public figures, and parade organizers, addressed their differences. In the end, unity prevailed and a great celebration of culture and pride took place each time.

"This upcoming June 11, on New York's iconic Fifth Avenue, the National Puerto Rican Day Parade will display a celebration full of cultural diversity and pride. The Parade will continue to serve as an educational platform, as it works alongside the community in a productive and positive manner. It will celebrate 100 outstanding young people who will receive the Parade's

scholarships. And yes, it will create awareness on issues, even if controversial, that affect us as a Puerto Rican community like the commutation of Oscar López Rivera's sentence after 35 years in jail, a journey we began in 2014 with an awareness and solidarity campaign for his cause.

"PBA's decision belongs to them; Goya's corporate decision belongs to them. We understand that others may not be able to be with us. However, we will continue to represent all voices, with an aim to spark dialogue and find common ground, so that we can help advance our community and build cultural legacy."

After the May 22 statement was published, news broke on May 23 that JetBlue, the New York Yankees, AT&T and Coca-Cola had also all agreed to not participate in the June 11 parade. In response to this latest news, the parade board issued the following

Parade Board Responds • 9

7 • DECOLONIZING EXPERIENCE

Oscar is free now from a 70-year sentence and all the attacks raised by them are really irrelevant.

Oscar has acquired a place in our anti-colonial struggle for self-determination, and independence. He has a role to play in this decolonization process, which by the way has already begun. We saw how in our quest to preserve human rights and defend our land base of Vieques, an island municipality of Puerto Rico, we successfully drove the U.S. Navy out of Vieques in 2001. The U.S. Navy bombed Vieques for 60 years during its war games with a civilian population residing there. That is state terrorism.

We freed 14 Puerto Rican Political Prisoners in 1999 (President Clinton's commutations) and now Oscar López Rivera, the last political prisoner of the 1980s was released by President Obama's commutation of his sentence on January 17, 2017.

We can list all the atrocities the U.S.

has committed on the Puerto Rican people in the last 118 years of their colonial violence and dominance, (but that is another article).

Oscar has become a symbol of resistance, perseverance, hope, love and most importantly "freedom" in these present times when the Puerto Rican people, the university students, and the workers are fighting and resisting with fervor the atrocities imposed by the Fiscal Control Board.

We ask everyone to support Puerto Rico's decolonization process and join us to Welcome Oscar to NYC Celebratory event at Hostos Community College on June 8, 2017 at 7 pm. We will have the largest contingent in the parade for Oscar. Join Us!

On May 22, 2017, we held a press conference at the 32BJ union hall led by the chants "We stand by the Puerto Rican Parade, Oscar Lopez is our hero today!", "Oscar Lopez Rivera is our Mandela!" and

"Oscar Lopez Rivera, Si, Junta, NO!"

We also issued a statement which read in part: "Over the past five years, millions have joined — through petitions, emails, tweets, demonstrations, prayer vigils, and contingents in the Parade — the call to speak with 'One Voice for Oscar,' proclaiming him the Nelson Mandela of the Americas. The National Puerto Rican Parade's choice to confer upon Oscar Lopez Rivera the title of "Procer de la Libertad" is a consequence of this widespread and diverse popular movement. The National Puerto Rican Parade has an indelible right to make such a choice, reflective of the vast majority of sentiment of the Puerto Rican people on the island and in the Diaspora."

(Ana M. López is the spokesperson of the NY Coordinator to Free Oscar, lead organizer of Welcoming Events, a member of the 35mujeresnycXOscar and is an assistant professor of Latin American studies at Hostos Community College.

NYC PUERTO RICAN DAY PARADE

Defend Decision to Honor Oscar

Joining with Puerto Ricans and peoples worldwide, the National Puerto Rican Day Parade Board decided to honor Oscar Lopez Rivera this year, proclaiming him a National Hero in the fight for Freedom (“*Prócer de la Libertad*”). In response, a number of major corporations, like Goya, AT&T, Coca-Cola and JetBlue, whose sponsorship largely funds scholarships for students, withdrew. They have pressured the board to denounce Oscar, repeating the U.S. slanders that he is a “terrorist.” Oscar was not convicted of any act of terror or violence. He was unjustly framed on a charge of seditious conspiracy because he fought for Puerto Rico’s independence and freedom. He was and remains a freedom fighter, organizing for the liberation of Puerto Rico from U.S. colonialism. It is this principled stand, which he has upheld and fought for despite years in prison, that frightens the rulers — and wins him broad support among his people and those worldwide.

Imprisoning those who fight for independence is one means the U.S. uses

to maintain Puerto Rico as a colony. The withdrawal of support for the parade is yet another. The Control Board imposed another. The notion being pushed is that Puerto Ricans have no right to determine their own affairs and must submit — in this case to corporations, in others to the U.S. government. It is the government that has imposed a Control Board on Puerto Rico, using unelected officials to dictate massive cuts to pensions, healthcare and education, privatizing resources and increasing poverty, all to pay debts created by and for U.S. financiers. Oscar has publicly denounced the Control Board and called on Puerto Ricans, *Do Not Pay the Debt!* This too is why there is an effort to force the Parade Board to denounce him. Oscar’s is a principled stand for rights.

The parade takes place in NYC on June 11, the same day as the U.S. imposed non-binding referendum on the status of Puerto Rico occurs on the island. While initially the referendum was to have only the options of statehood and independence/free association, a letter from the Trump administration

recommended to add the Commonwealth, the current status. The option had been removed in response to the results of the referendum in 2012 which asked whether to remain in the current status and No had won. However, the Trump administration demanded that it be added.

U.S. refuses to submit to the U.N.’s decolonization process, and instead uses these non-binding referendums to justify its continued occupation of the island. It uses its military forces and economic role and threats to deny benefits, all as a means to block the right of Puerto Ricans to determine their own affairs, free from U.S. interference. The effort to prevent Oscar from being honored is part of this same U.S. refusal to honor the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination and the requirement to end U.S. colonialism. Oscar is a staunch representative of this fight for independence. Defending the decision of the board to honor him and joining the parade are means to reject this U.S. dictate and stand for the right to self-determination.

8 • PARADE BOARD RESPONDS

statement May 23:

“While we are saddened and disappointed by certain sponsors pulling out of our Parade, we respect their views and decision to do so. Equally, we respect our Parade’s mission and commitment to inclusiveness, and the responsibility of representing the broadest possible blend of voices that make up the Puerto Rican community. [...] We thank the thousands of individuals, elected officials and community leaders who have expressed their support for the Parade, its 2017 honoree roster, and its commitment to raise awareness about the issues that impact Puerto Ricans across the world, even if some issues might spark a conversation.”

NYC Council Issues Letter in Support

Later in the day on the 22nd, the New York City Council issued a letter in support of the parade.

“Dear National Puerto Rican Day Parade

Board:

“We commend you for recognizing that Oscar López Rivera represents the voice, tenacity and resolve of Puerto Rico and its people. As countless families continue to struggle in Puerto Rico’s current fiscal crisis, Oscar is a reminder of the hope that has always anchored the Island — and that is why we fully stand behind your efforts to honor him during this year’s 60th National Puerto Rican Day parade. Oscar’s presence will lift people’s spirits and bring attention to the challenges that must be immediately addressed on the Island.

“As you know, June 11th is a day to come together as a community, and we are highly disappointed that one of the parade’s main sponsors has backed out of supporting this longstanding tradition, which as its primary purpose, has celebrated the advances and contributions of the Puerto Rican community. We march to honor our history

and uplift our people — a message all of the parade’s sponsors should take to heart.

“We stand in solidarity with Oscar and express our full support for the Board’s decision to recognize and uplift the legacy of Oscar López Rivera.

New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who was in Puerto Rico to support López Rivera, complimented the parade for honoring him.

“Oscar López Rivera represents the voice, tenacity and resolve of Puerto Rico and its struggles,” Mark-Viverito told *Latino USA*. “His release is not only a win for our island, but for our country’s democracy and criminal justice system — and that is why I am proud that tireless advocacy led to President Obama granting Oscar clemency. We stand in solidarity with Oscar, and I thank the National Puerto Rican Day parade for recognizing and uplifting his legacy.”

OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA TO PUERTO RICANS:

Refuse to Pay the Debt!

The following is a letter written by Oscar López Rivera, January 6, 2016, before his freedom was won by the peoples' movements in Puerto Rico, the U.S. and worldwide. It speaks to the demands by Wall Street that Puerto Rico accept massive cuts to jobs, pensions, education and healthcare in order to pay debts the people do not owe. We reprint excerpts now as part of saluting the just stand of Oscar while in prison, and now when he is free.

In my pack of worries, there are two very big concerns that have been added: the debt crisis in Puerto Rico and that my granddaughter Karina has to incur a huge debt to gain entry into a dental school. I have to admit that for the last one, I have no way of doing anything to help her. Student debt in this country is more than \$3 trillion and growing. It is painful to see my granddaughter Karina adding her name to the list of student debtors.

The Snares of Student Debt

Today, students from working-class families have fewer and fewer opportunities to enter graduate schools. And with an enormous debt, the opportunities are fewer. And if you are in the fields of medicine, engineering and other well-paid professions, the chances are even lower. It is not because students are not smart enough or because they are not academically prepared, but because of the cost and the system that has been created to entrap them in the snares of student loan debt.

How can a student of a working-class



family come up with \$68,000 a year for four years just for education? By the time my dear granddaughter graduates, she may have a debt of almost half a million dollars. So she will begin her career in the red and stay in the red for many years.

Who talks about that system? Who denies life to a student who has worked hard to get into a dental school, only because she was not born into a family with money and influence?

This is the age of debts. The system runs on debts. But nothing is said to the public about debt entrapment being part of the system. The only time we have heard about the debt trap is when a nation cannot afford to pay up. Puerto Ricans know now what the debt trap does to the working class. Puerto Rico has an unpayable debt, and the Governor has informed them that it cannot be paid.

Decades of corrupt politicians piling on debt has impoverished Puerto Rico and has forced many young people with good professions to migrate, causing a massive brain drain. In addition, it forces Puerto Rico to privatize some of the best public corporations that provide good jobs and help to boost the economy. The unpayable debt was created by the vultures of Wall Street, the neoliberal Washington politicians, and the corrupt politicians in Puerto Rico. They are the ones who should be paying off the debt. I can see my beautiful granddaughter ten years from now, still paying to the creators of the debt, for wanting to be a good dentist. And she is not the only young Puerto Rican

going through this same ordeal.

Let those who made the deals pay the debt

In order to deal with the debt, I will start with a suggestion about what we must do and can do. My first suggestion is that all we Puerto Ricans get organized and take just one position: Refuse the debt payment and start a debt boycott. To begin with, we can start chanting: "That's a debt I will not pay, those who borrowed it must pay." ("Esa deuda no la pago yo, que la pague el que la incurrió.") Let us call for a boycott and start organizing. The debt crisis is a problem that affects all Puerto Ricans, and each and every one of us must take a stand and refuse to pay for it. In every city and in the Diaspora, every Puerto Rican must say that we cannot pay the debt and therefore we refuse to pay it.

Every child, youth and adult, including the elderly, must be part of this massive boycott in Puerto Rico. And every Puerto Rican should ask for compensation for all the pain, exploitation, repression, persecution and destruction we have experienced since 1898, after the United States invaded and occupied and militarized Puerto Rico. We can accept no austerity plan, not even one imposed on us.

We are poor, but we are hard workers and have every right to say no to the impositions that Wall Street and Washington will try to put on us. Every Puerto Rican who cares about the future of Puerto Rico and wants a better and fairer world must say NO to the payment of the debt. And every Puerto Rican who aspires to political office must agree to be part of the boycott. And every pro-independence militant must do everything he or she can possibly do to create unity among them in the struggle for independence.

On another note, several compañeros and friends have asked me how I feel about having the name of Ana Belén Montes linked with mine in the campaign for my release. For me it would be a great honor. I think that every Puerto Rican who loves justice and freedom should be proud of Ana

Refuse to Pay the Debt • 12



Bankrupt U.S. Policy for Puerto Rico

David Dayen, May 8, 2017

The restructuring of the island's debt allows no role for the Puerto Rico's government or people.

The endgame for Puerto Rico's debilitating fiscal crisis has begun. Unable to manage a \$73 billion debt that has accompanied a decade of recession, spikes in poverty, and a mass exodus of citizens, the island will now turn to federal courts to approve a resolution with its creditors.

But in many ways nothing has changed for Puerto Rico. The congressionally-imposed fiscal oversight board, known locally as the junta, remains in control as lead negotiator in restructuring talks. Whether Puerto Rico's three million citizens get a fair deal or a continuation of harsh austerity depends almost entirely on seven unelected, unaccountable technocrats.

Frustrating journalists everywhere, what Puerto Rico did on Wednesday cannot be called "bankruptcy," because Congressional Republicans who passed last year's PROMESA law did not want to be saddled with such language. But the process under Title III of that law uses the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure to allow a court to administer and sanction restructured compensation for Puerto Rico's creditors. Like a Chapter 9 bankruptcy, the judge can force bondholders [and pensioners] to take a haircut, even if they do not consent to the agreement. The result will amount to the largest-ever municipal not-bankruptcy bankruptcy in the United States.

But there are some key differences between Title III and a normal bankruptcy process. First of all, under Section 308(a) of PROMESA, the decision for who hears this case, bizarrely, is up to Chief Justice John Roberts. He selected U.S. District Court Judge Laura Taylor Swain to preside. [...] This puts the case in the heart of New York City, the nation's financial center, rather than Puerto Rico.

In addition, the elected government of Puerto Rico plays almost no role in this fight. The junta, an appointed body ushered in by PROMESA, actually filed the Title III order, and serves as the government's "representative" in court. Only the junta can introduce or modify "adjustment plans" for

the \$73 billion in debts. They will be the sole negotiator with bondholders, not anyone approved by the Puerto Rican people through a formal vote.

Lawyers for bondholders have openly stated that the junta will enable them to win "fairer" outcomes in negotiations. [...]

Furthermore, you cannot look at Title III in a vacuum. In March, the junta forced Puerto Rico into yet more austerity, a necessary condition to invoke the bankruptcy-like process. This blueprint added \$39.6 billion in revenue hikes and budget cutbacks, some of them rather vicious, in particular hits to the health system and public education. Public pension spending must drop by 10 percent within three years, through a conversion to 401(k) plans from defined-benefit awards. Water rates must go up. Core government operations must be privatized. Furloughs starting July 1 must be initiated; the school year would be cut by two months as a result.

Puerto Rico's 12 percent unemployment rate has worsened every month for over four years, and those numbers have not improved since the junta took over.

Savagery Required Under Promesa

This savagery was required under PROMESA before triggering Title III. Activists have protested forced austerity for months, blaming the junta for prolonging the pain. On May Day, police broke up demonstrations with tear gas. Professionals continue to abandon the island, particularly medical students. And nothing the junta has instituted thus far has done anything for the island economy.

Even still, the austerity plan only allocated \$800 million a year for debt service, far below the \$3.5 billion owed. This angered bondholders and collapsed debt talks, leading to the invocation of Title III.

Remember that many vulture investors scooped up tax-exempt Puerto Rican debt at severe discounts, expecting a giant payday. But mutual funds who purchased debt at par, or bond insurers who pay off creditors who lose money, have far less room for error. One of them, Assured Guaranty, already sued the junta on Thursday, challenging

the low annual allocation for Puerto Rican debt service.

Judges typically have wide discretion to alter terms in bankruptcy. [...] According to PROMESA, courts can only confirm a restructuring plan if it is "feasible" and "in the best interests of creditors." The judge will have to consider other options that "would result in a greater recovery for the creditors." In addition, creditors' "lawful priorities or lawful liens" must be respected.

How is Puerto Rico protected? PROMESA says the ultimate fiscal plan must "provide adequate funding for public pension systems," but there is no definition of adequacy. Also, the court cannot "interfere with ... the property or revenues of the debtor," with one caveat — the junta's consent. [...]

Deeper Economic Colonialism

Whose interests the junta has at heart, Puerto Rican citizens or the moneymen, will be revealed in this process. To be clear, the junta did not design the Title III process themselves. The U.S. Congress — heavily lobbied by financial interests — engineered the loss of sovereignty, bias toward austerity, and questionable restructuring rules in PROMESA, and President Obama validated it with his signature. While \$295 million in this week's omnibus spending bill to replenish Puerto Rico's Medicaid fund will help avert disaster, it amounts to a fraction of the help needed, and the only dollars ever requisitioned for the island throughout this entire ordeal.

In effect, the island has gone from a political form of colony to an even deeper economic colonialism, in which its fate is the hands of distant fiscal masters. Since passage, lawmakers from both parties have insisted that PROMESA reflected the best they could possibly do to prevent chaos in Puerto Rico. Over the next couple years, we will get to see what that looks like: will it be a lifeline for the commonwealth, or more like the ravaging of Greece by the EU and the IMF? I am not looking forward to learning the answer, nor should any Puerto Rican.

I • RASMEA SALUTES OSCAR

mass rally welcoming Oscar to Chicago.
* * *

In my organizing career, I have spoken in front of the Palestine National Council, the Palestinian legislative body in exile, and in front of a United Nations special committee in Geneva, but I am as proud to be in front of this audience tonight as I have ever been in my entire life.

Oscar, I was released after 10 years as a political prisoner in Palestine two years before you started your sentence, and I know your story very well, because your life is an example to me and to all of us. You have taught us what it means to be principled and committed to your people and all oppressed peoples of the world. We thank you for your sacrifice and your strength, and the way you motivate us to fight for our rights and our liberation like you always have.

The Puerto Ricans in this city have always been close to our community. We have faced similar grand jury repression and attacks on our activism. We have marched together in dozens of protests for immigrant rights, Palestinian independence, Puerto Rican independence, and other social justice issues. We organized together at University of Illinois, Chicago, in the radical student days, and no other community mobilized like yours when the government came after the Palestine support movement and the Anti-War 23 in Chicago in 2010.


NYC VICTORY CELEBRATION

Welcoming event
June 8th, 2017 @ 7pm

Oscar López Rivera
"The Mandela of the Americas,"
a 74 year old Puerto Rican political prisoner
after serving more than 35 years in US prisons,
visits New York.

Hostos Community College
Main Theatre
450 Grand Concourse, Bronx NY
for information contact
nycoordinator.freeoscar@gmail.com or
Facebook.com/WelcomeOscartoNYC

OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA



And now we get to celebrate together — with the National Boricua Human Rights Network and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and all of you — the freedom of your leader Oscar Lopez. But he is not just your leader. He is our leader too.

Oscar, over six thousand Palestinians are political prisoners in Israeli jails because they fight for what you fight for, self-determination and an end to colonialism and full and complete independence. One thousand eight hundred of them are currently on an open-ended hunger strike in its 31st day, and they are in need of your

voice of support, because they are inspired by your freedom and your refusal to accept anything less than all of your people's demands.

I have faced my own criminalization by the U.S. government, and will have to leave my home here in a few months. Wherever I land, I will continue my fight for Palestinian independence, and I will continue to support the independence of Puerto Rico. And I pray that we both live long enough to see our two nations free from the evils of colonialism and U.S. imperialism. Welcome home, Oscar!

I • REFUSE TO PAY THE DEBT

Belén. What she did was more than heroic. She did what any person would have done who believes in peace, justice and freedom and the right of every nation to govern itself in the best possible way and without intervention or threat from anyone. She did what she did because she knew that the U.S. government intended to destroy the Cuban government and impose a system designed by Washington on the Cuban people with another regime-change. The objectives of the U.S. government were criminal, and if she had not acted as she did, she would have wound up supporting those acts. Let us all be proud of her, support her and demand her release from prison.

This January 6, I cannot be with you

physically, but even from within these walls I can help. Let us make 2016 the year that we Puerto Ricans rise up together in to put an end to colonialism. We can do it. No matter if the person has been a red PPD, a blue PNP, a green and white PIP or a red Socialist, if we are an authentic Puerto Rican, we love freedom and justice and we want to be treated with respect as human beings, we will unite and stand up together.

Enjoy the moment and feel inspired by the beautiful example that Compañero Juan Santiago left for us to emulate. Let us dare to fight and to win.

Hugs and much love to all.
In resistance and struggle,
Oscar López Rivera

Notes:

1) Ana Belén Montes is a Puerto Rican woman who worked in the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, and is now isolated in a Texas prison for defending the people of Cuba.

2) PPD is the Democratic Popular Party, the current administration which defends the colonial position of Puerto Rico as a "Free Associated State."

3) PNP is the New Progressive Party, pro statehood.

4) PIP is the Puerto Rican Independence Party.

5) Juan Santiago is a people's lawyer who defended independence activists and died in June 2012.