The mass protests in Puerto Rico

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24 July 2019

Between 500,000 and one million Puerto Ricans took to the streets of the capital San Juan Monday in the largest demonstration in the island's history. Even the low-end figure, 500,000, would mean 16 percent of the territory's population of 3.2 million protested Monday.

The same percentage applied to the US mainland would equal 50 million protestors, a prospect that fills the ruling class with fear.

Less than two weeks ago, the Puerto Rican Center for Investigative Journalism published 900 pages of instant messages detailing the contempt which the ruling class has for workers and youth. When journalists defy the media establishment and actually report on the intrigues of the ruling class, the implications are revolutionary.

In the text messages, Governor Ricardo Rosselló and his advisers disparage student protestors and plan to crush their demonstrations, discuss using complacent corporate-bought media to silence independent journalists, plan to distribute "fake news" propaganda videos secretly produced by the government to dull opposition, talk about blocking police reform and mock impoverished residents for being forced to use dangerous public infrastructure.

In the most inflammatory message, Rosselló mocks those workers who the US government left for dead after Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017: "Now that we are on the subject," Rosselló's chief executive Sobrino Vega said, "don't we have some cadavers to feed our crows?"

This line has burned its way into the consciousness of millions of people, the Puerto Rican equivalent of Maria Antoinette's "let them eat cake." It has triggered such explosive anger because it taps into profound historical and social grievances building up beneath the surface of Puerto Rican society for decades. On a territory stolen by conquest in the early days of American imperialism, where the subjects have no real right to elect representatives, masses of people are deciding to seek a redress of grievances outside the framework of the political establishment.

The Democratic Party and its press organs have attempted to downplay the class character of the opposition that has exploded after the publication of the texts, portraying the anger as largely over questions of race and identity. The *New York Times* wrote Monday that "the exchanges revealed an arrogant 'bro' culture of elites" who "ridiculed an obese man, a poor man, a gay pop star, and several women."

In actual fact, the grievances of the Puerto Rican people are rooted in the deep poverty and colonial exploitation of the island by US imperialism.

Both major US political parties abandoned the population in the aftermath of Hurricanes Maria and Irma, which left nearly 5,000 people dead.

When the hurricane struck, the federal and local governments lied to the population about the death toll and refused to make any real effort to provide aid. US President Donald Trump boasted that the hurricanes were not "real catastrophes" because they "only" killed 16 people, calling the government response an "incredible success." Weeks later, he flew to the island for a photo op, tossing what he called "beautiful, soft paper towels" to desperate onlookers.

Monday, Trump poured gasoline on the fire when he called himself "the best thing that ever happened to Puerto Rico" adding, "We did a great job in Puerto Rico."

Some 10,000 schools, bridges, roads and other infrastructure were destroyed by the hurricanes. As of last week, only *nine* reconstruction projects had been approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The government is moving forward with a years-long plan of privatizations and austerity budgets to pay off the island's Wall Street creditors by eviscerating social programs and public education.

The American ruling class, rattled by crisis upon

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crisis, is desperate to stop the Puerto Rican protests from triggering mass strikes and protests on the mainland, where the same extreme inequality and poverty dominates all elements of political and social life.

Due to the fact that Trump is widely hated across Puerto Rico, chief responsibility for suppressing the demonstrations falls to the Democratic Party.

Rosselló, a member of the New Progressive Party (PNP), is a Democrat and a member of the Democratic Governor's Association. He was a delegate at the Democratic National Convention for Hillary Clinton in 2008 and for Barack Obama in 2012. Both major parties in Puerto Rico are dominated by the mainland Democrats.

For over a week, the Democratic Party remained silent on their governor's texts. On Monday afternoon, when it became clear that the protests were massive, a command was sent out, and all leading Democrats issued tweets and perfunctory statements in an attempt to get in front of the demonstrations to bring them under control.

The movement in Puerto Rico heralds the expansion and intensification of the global wave of strikes and protests. Herein lies the path that the working class must take in response to the political crisis in Washington between the two reactionary factions of the American ruling class.

Trump is developing a fascist strategy aimed at preparing for the physical destruction of the coming working class struggles. The Democrats, no less the party of Wall Street, are obsessed with censoring the Internet, strengthening the military and intelligence agencies, and focusing opposition to Trump based on anti-Russian hysteria and concerns that Trump is insufficiently prosecuting the interests of US imperialism abroad.

In recent months, mass demonstrations of a historically unprecedented scale have taken place on almost every continent. In Hong Kong, Algeria, France and Puerto Rico, masses of people have poured into the streets of metropolis and former colony alike.

Though the languages of their voices and signs are different, their demands—for democratic rights and economic equality—speak the language of an emerging social force: the international working class. Young people—exploited, indebted, unemployed and underpaid—are playing a prominent role in the rising tide of social struggle. Over half of the world's population is under the age of 30. In Puerto Rico, it was young people who used social media to disseminate Rosselló's texts to their friends and coworkers.

The protests are demanding the resignation of Rosselló, which so far, the governor has refused. The fact is that neither a Democratic-led impeachment of Trump nor the resignation of Rosselló will fundamentally improve the situation confronting the working class in Puerto Rico and the mainland US.

Addressing the root cause of inequality, official corruption and attacks on democratic rights requires the broadest mobilization of the international working class, leading the youth and healthy elements of the middle class, in a struggle against the capitalist system.

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