

new movement in solidarity with puerto rican independence

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NEWSLETTER

NO. 4-5

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RETRAIMIENTO AND THE PRISONERS OF WAR

On April 4, 1980, eleven Puerto Ricans, alleged members of the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional), were arrested in Evanston, Illinois, and charged with illegal possession of weapons, robbery and possession of stolen vehicles. Ten were tried in Chicago criminal courts and were convicted; one was extradited to New York, tried for murder and convicted. Ten of those same Puerto Ricans were convicted in federal court for seditious conspiracy, i.e. conspiring to overthrow, put down or to destroy by force the government of the United States. They received sentences ranging from 55 to 90 years.

Throughout the proceedings the prisoners refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the courts or to cooperate with them in any way. They did not attempt either to establish their innocence or to provide a political defense of their actions. Without the opposition of defense attorneys and the threat of appeal, prosecutors and judges abandoned legal standards for fair and impartial hearings. Potential North American supporters are confused and frustrated. Why don't they defend themselves? Why don't they use the trials to present their views to the public?

NATION AT WAR

Puerto Rico was a sovereign nation when the United States invaded in 1898. The Carta Autonmica won from Spain conferred full sovereign powers upon the island. It also contained a provision that the island's political status could not be changed without the participation and consent of the Puerto Rican parliament. The military invasion of Puerto Rico and the subsequent cession of Puerto Rico by Spain to the United States violated both Puerto Rico's sovereignty and the provisions of the Charter of Autonomy.

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WOMEN'S LIBERATION & PUERTO RICAN INDEPENDENCE

As we celebrate International Women's Day this year, it is important for us to understand the important role of the Puerto Rican independence movement in the effort to end all oppression. It is also important for us to see how the liberation of women is linked to the end of imperialism. We can find in successful national liberation struggles such as Nicaragua and Zimbabwe the evidence that women have begun their liberation through the process of liberating their nation. This is also true in Puerto Rico.

As North American women we have much to learn from the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle. This is true not only because of the leading role Puerto Rican women have played in their country's struggle for independence for more than a century, but because of what that whole struggle exposes about the nature of the system we live in and confront daily.

To understand how and why Puerto Rican women fight, and who they define as their enemy, we must understand the situation of Puerto Rico. That situation—and the resistance to it—is clearly seen in the example of the Eleven Puerto Rican Prisoners of War. These five women and six men are freedom fighters for Puerto Rican independence, and they defy the jurisdiction of U.S. courts over them because Puerto Rico is a colony of the U.S.

Puerto Rico is a nation intervened. Since the U.S. invasion of 1898, all areas of the lives of Puerto Rican women and children have been disrupted and defined by the oppression that is U.S. colonization. Puerto Ricans were driven from their land and agriculture by the U.S., which now uses 13% of the land for their military bases. With an official unemployment rate of 35% and with 80% of the families eligible for food stamps, millions of Puerto Ricans have been dispersed to the U.S., where 40% of all Puerto Ricans now live in similar conditions of poverty and exploitation.

At every point since the U.S. invasion, this colonial oppression has been resisted and Puerto Rican women have always been leading participants in that struggle. They have been targetted by the U.S. for particular forms of oppression. Today, the Puerto Rican struggle for independence is at a high point, promising to begin to drive the U.S. from its illegal con-

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Women

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trol of the island nation and to help overturn the whole system of oppression in this country as well.

The revolutionary Puerto Rican woman identifies her main enemy as U.S. imperialism. This is based on the undeniable reality that this system is at the root of the oppression she and her country face.

For instance, the U.S. has had a policy since the early 1930's of "population control" as a mechanism to maintain its power over Puerto Rico. One of the most brutal ways this genocidal program has made its impact felt on Puerto Rican women is through massive sterilization and the testing of untried birth control drugs and devices. As Che Guevara said, "It's easier to kill a guerilla in the womb than in the mountains." Every time the Puerto Rican resistance has mounted, the U.S. has stepped up its efforts to sterilize Puerto Rican women. Today, nearly 40% of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age are sterilized, with a very high proportion in their teens and '20's. Puerto Rico was one of the first countries targetted for birth control programs. Puerto Rican women have been used as human guinea pigs to test U.S. manufactured contraceptives.

To fight this genocidal oppression, Puerto Rican women, alongside their male comrades, have taken up all forms of resistance—words, strikes, and ultimately arms. Puerto Rican women have been leaders at every stage of Puerto Rico's continuing liberation process. Blanca Canales led the 1950 Jayuya Rebellion against U.S. control. Lolita Lebron led the 1954 attack on the U.S. Congress demanding independence. Today 5 of the Eleven Puerto Rican Prisoners of War, accused of being members of the F.A.L.N. and sentenced to 55-90 years for seditious conspiracy against the U.S., are heroic revolutionary women.

The five women Prisoners of War fight the war against U.S. colonialism here in the U.S., where 3½ million Puerto Ricans form one of the most marginalized sectors of society. Puerto Ricans live in Chicago and New York in barrios where access to quality education, health care and jobs is denied. The results are predictable: high unemployment, dropout rate and infant mortality. Those that do survive are likely targets for the police. This treatment of an oppressed nationality by the U.S. is also true of the situation of Blacks and Chicano-Mexicans in the U.S. U.S. imperialism exists at home and in Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican Prisoners of War fought back against the genocidal treatment of their people. Haydee Torres spoke of her position as a Puerto Rican woman fighter this way:

"As a woman, a Puerto Rican woman in the struggle for independence, I see myself when I fight, as much more as a human being than

as a woman. I think that you have to believe in what you are doing is going to make a difference. It's my right, my duty to be there. It's my duty to do whatever is humanly possible for me to do, and if my life, if losing my life is part of the struggle, then I will do it."

The U.S. fears Haydee and the Eleven, not only for their personal qualities, but because the struggle for Puerto Rican independence and socialism they embody is a major threat to U.S. domination in the Caribbean and Latin America, and to the stability of the imperialist system at home. The uncompromising example of the Eleven has motivated the masses of Puerto Rican people in the struggle both in Puerto Rico and within the urban centers of the U.S. Many other progressive people within the U.S. are also taking up their cause.

What can the example of Puerto Rican women teach North American women? In 1981 the attacks on the women's movement have escalated to the highest level in decades. In every area—health, birth control, child care, employment—women's rights have been set back. There is a backlash against the outspoken women's liberation movement of the 60's and 70's. Women are now an acceptable target in a society that needs pressure release valves. This fact is evident in movies, television programs and editorials in the print media that portray women as victims. One intent of this media campaign and the decreased access to abortion, education and high-paying jobs is to try to force white women back into the homes and out of the work force. At this moment, U.S. imperialism finds itself in a crisis—weakened by successful national liberation struggles in Africa and Central America—in a period of decline as a world power. There are less benefits to pass around. Women are a population capitalism has always manipulated to its own advantage. The system of capitalism defines a social and economic role for women that grows out of the existence of private property. This has always been true, but now with U.S. economic decline, the traditional definitions of women are being re-introduced.

The attack on white women by the system is NOT genocidal in intent, as it is against populations of oppressed nationalities within the U.S. However, a certain level of casualties are expected, a necessary loss in maintaining U.S. imperialism.

What should we do, given this situation? A defensive position of holding on to the gains of the 60's can at best result in slowing the erosion. The lessons of the Puerto Rican independence movement, as well as other national liberation struggles, should push us towards taking an offensive position—one that recognizes the true enemy of women as U.S. imperialism, this system that will never serve the true interests of women. This is true because of the economic and



social function women fulfill under imperialism. It is also true because under this system, gains for white women can only come at the expense of other oppressed populations or colonies. This is not true freedom or liberation. In order to build a new society in which women and all people can live up to our true potential, this system must end. The end of imperialism does not ensure liberation of women, of course. It is a struggle that continues as the new society is built. It is impossible, however, for women's liberation to be achieved unless imperialism is defeated.

The Puerto Rican struggle poses a very direct threat to the continued existence of U.S. imperialism. It is important for women struggling against all oppression, and against imperialism, to begin to take up concrete solidarity with the Puerto Rican national liberation movement.

Women can do much to participate in this struggle for Puerto Rican independence and socialism. In Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco, women's committees have formed. These groups have taken slideshows concerning the role of Puerto Rican women in the independence movement to women's centers, organizations in the women's community and to house parties. Several national women's newspapers, including current issues of *Big Mama Rag*, *Through the Looking Glass*, and *No More Cages*, have printed articles about the Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and the situation in Puerto Rico.

You can become involved in the effort to bring the lessons of the Puerto Rican struggle to the women's movement in many ways. Join or begin a women's committee in your area. Invite a speaker to come to your women's group or organization, or arrange for a slideshow about Puerto Rican women in the independence movement. You can also contribute by printing articles concerning Puerto Rico in your newsletter or paper, or by putting your name on our mailing list to receive more information about the issues.

Puerto Rico's revolutionary liberation struggle is just beginning, but it is developing rapidly. It is an important time for each of us to participate in this process of weakening the colonial basis of the U.S. imperialist system on whatever level we can—as women and as people committed to fundamentally changing this oppressive society.

“As the Puerto Rican revolution grows, we can assure you that U.S. imperialism will be altered dramatically. The struggle for Puerto Rico's national liberation is escalating. Each and every one of us has a role to play within that struggle. We have an obligation to support and participate in that struggle at all levels. Victory to national liberation—by whatever means necessary!”

—Alejandrina Torres, National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War

RETRAIMIENTO AND THE P.O.W.s
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Nationalists, therefore, define Puerto Rico as a "militarily intervened" nation at war with the United States and advocate a policy of retraimiento, deliberate non-recognition of and non-cooperation with all aspects of the colonial regime. Retraimiento is conscious political non-participation. It is the "no" to colonial oppression that frees people's spirits, affirms Puerto Rican nationhood and creates the conditions for people to seize the initiative and set the terms for their own struggle. Although a "no", retraimiento is a positive political act, at the same time delegitimizing the colonial regime and catalyzing new forms of popular militance. The armed clandestine movement directly attacks the colonial regime and forms the basis for political organization not tied to colonialism. The culmination of retraimiento in people's war will drive the United States from Puerto Rico.

The eleven Puerto Ricans have declared themselves prisoners of war. Their stance is based on the history of their nation and a strategy for national liberation. The following sections of this article focus on only one aspect of Puerto Rican history, the use of the courts as an instrument of colonial repression. Future articles will address other aspects of the prisoner-of-war stance.

WHOSE LAW?

The United States established a civilian administration in Puerto Rico through two "organic acts," the Foraker Act of 1900 and the Jones Act of 1917. (An "organic act" is a legal and political framework imposed by the U.S. Congress as opposed to a constitution written by the residents of Puerto Rico.) The acts gave the United States Congress legislative powers; the U.S. President, veto and appointive powers; and the U.S. courts, review powers. The Jones Act imposed North American citizenship collectively on the Puerto Rican people. Those who chose to retain their Puerto Rican citizenship were divested of all their political rights. The structure within which the Puerto Rican government operated could not be altered, annulled or modified by the people of Puerto Rico.

Law 600, passed in July 1950, established the category of "commonwealth" or "free associated state" for Puerto Rico

and permitted the Puerto Rican people to draw up a constitution subject to the approval of the U.S. Congress. Congressman Joseph Mahoney of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in explaining the Commonwealth status to this colleagues stated: "The U.S. Constitution gives the U.S. Congress complete control, and nothing in the Puerto Rican Constitution could affect or amend or alter that right." Law 600 continued the U.S. Congress's power to legislate for Puerto Rico, and the "organic acts" were retained as "Laws of Federal Relations." The essence of the colonial relationship was not affected. The law for Puerto Ricans, both in the United States and in Puerto Rico, is U.S. law.

WHOSE ORDER?

The "organic acts" provided the legal framework for the penetration of North American economic and military interests into Puerto Rico. The courts have played an active role in promoting and protecting those interests.

When land was required in the 1900's for military bases and sugar plantations, the courts nullified the property rights of thousands of Puerto Rican farmers because they could not prove legal title to the land. The U.S. Navy in the 1940's appropriated 76% of the land on the island of Vieques simply by depositing money with the Federal Court of Expropriations equal to the extremely low prices fixed by that court. At the same time the Taft-Hartley Act was enforced in Puerto Rico to bring an already divided workers' movement under control in preparation for industrialization by U.S. firms and organizing by U.S. international unions.

A massive effort was made to induct independentistas into the U.S. armed forces during World War II. When they resisted compulsory military service, they were rounded up and imprisoned in the United States. Hundreds more young men were jailed for their refusal to obey the compulsory service law in support of the Vietnamese people's resistance to U.S. aggression two decades later.

Many independentistas have been arrested, tried and convicted on criminal charges, such as trespassing and weapons charges, in attempts to discredit and de-politicize them and their political activity. Some, isolated in U.S. prisons, have been brutally treated, even murdered.



3 OF THE 11 PUERTO RICAN P.O.W.'S ON THE DAY OF THEIR ARREST, APRIL 4, 1950.

SEDITION CHARGES AND GRAND JURIES

The Puerto Rican independence movement's challenge to continued U.S. domination has been met by violence in combination with overtly political judicial proceedings, particularly the use of sedition charges and of the federal grand jury. As the strength of the Nationalist Party, dedicated to the liberation of Puerto Rico, reached its peak, its leadership was indicted in 1936 on charges of seditious conspiracy. They were tried in federal court and judged guilty by a hand-picked jury merely for having advocated revolution. A second blow was dealt the Nationalist Party the following year when an unarmed demonstration in Ponce was attacked by the police who killed 21 people and injured hundreds. Friends of the dead were immediately indicted on charges of conspiracy to commit murder.

As pro-independence activity increased again after World War II, the colonial legislature, under strong pressure from the United States, passed Law 53. A clear attempt to persecute the most radical sectors of the independence movement, the "Law of the Muzzle" made it a crime to speak, write, distribute literature or organize groups to advocate independence. The Nationalist Party reacted by staging an armed insurrection, but, poorly equipped and badly outnumbered, they were defeated. Thousands of people--writers, poets, communists and nationalists--were arrested. Many were sent to prison on the strength of writings or recordings of speeches in police archives. Nationalist Party mem-

bers in the United States, including the four who attacked the U.S. Congress in 1954, were tried and imprisoned for seditious conspiracy.

More recently the United States has used federal grand juries in New York, Chicago and Puerto Rico to collect information about, discredit and disrupt the Puerto Rican independence movement. Although the grand juries are convened allegedly to investigate specific acts, the proceedings clearly demonstrate that the government has little or no evidence, but seeks to investigate the entire independence movement. Activists who have refused to cooperate have been jailed without having been accused or convicted of a crime.

CONCLUSION

Clearly the courts are part and parcel of the illegitimate authority oppressing the Puerto Rican people. The use of the laws and the courts historically has been to repress the efforts of the Puerto Rican people to gain their freedom. The prisoner-of-war stance taken by the eleven Puerto Ricans reflects this aspect of their history, but also an entire strategy for national liberation including the leading role of the armed clandestine movement and the role of internationalism. It provides an example which Puerto Rican people can understand and which can have a profound effect on the liberation movement. The Eleven are using the courts to organize their people and to win international support.



UPDATE

When the Ejercito Popular Boricua - Macheteros destroyed nine U.S. fighter bombers and damaged two others on the ground at Muñiz U.S. Air National Guard Base, adjacent to San Juan International Airport, in January, they focussed world attention on the Puerto Rican independence struggle.

The EPB communique stated that the action was taken to oppose U.S. control of Puerto Rico and in particular, the operation of U.S. draft registration in Puerto Rico, the occupation of Puerto Rican soil by U.S. military bases, and the use of Puerto Rico by the U.S. to develop military moves against the revolutionary democratic struggle in El Salvador. The EPB also called for the freedom of the 11 P.O.W.s.

The Macheteros also videotaped the preparations for the action, about 2 minutes of which was aired on Puerto Rican TV news by a reporter, Carmen Jovet, who thereby became a target of FBI and grand jury harassment. The Macheteros reported that several women were among the dozen participants in the action.

The destruction of the military aircraft, captured in dozens of widely-publicized dramatic photos in the U.S. and world press, was the costliest attack on a U.S. military base since World War II, with over \$45 million in damages. U.S. and Puerto Rican authorities fear the infiltration of the National Guard by elements of the armed clandestine independence movement. Gov. Romero Barcelo, saying that the colonial regime is unable to deal with the situation, has called for direct U.S. intervention against the revolutionary movement. This is a sign of the great sophistication and strength of the clandestine movement. In recent weeks, Barcelo has been in the Panama Canal Zone for meetings with U.S. military counter-insurgency experts and in D.C. for a series of meetings with Reagan and his top cabinet people.

The first sign of this new involve-

ment, in both Puerto Rico and the U.S. seems to be a pattern of complete fabrications to provide excuses for the arrest of public independentistas who have been identified as supporting the revolutionary underground movement.

In Puerto Rico, Norberto Cintron Fiallo, a leader of the Movimiento Obrero Unido which attempted to organize workers struggle from an independence perspective in the '70's, was arrested, along with two others, for allegedly carrying out a bank robbery which the government attributes to the Macheteros. Cintron Fiallo, however, had been under constant FBI surveillance for weeks prior to the alleged robbery.

Moreover, the robbery story itself reeks of contradictory and phony elements. The FBI, supposedly operating on information received, had the week before taken over the entire bank, substituting its own people for bank employees. When a suspicious client called police, a Keystone Kops confrontation ensued, as a fatal shootout between cops and FBI agents was only narrowly avoided. FBI statements to the press claim that the bank robbers watched this from a safe a distance and split, to return a week later to carry out the robbery without federal or police intervention.

Headline stories on the robbery by three men in combat fatigues were followed swiftly by the arrest of Cintron Fiallo and two others. The government released a fantastic story about a 'beautiful blonde' woman who had been a leader of the bank-robbing Macheteros but now had turned informer in return for a new, secret identity.

What seems likelier is that the U.S., tremendously embarrassed by the losses at Muñiz Air Base and by its continuing inability to infiltrate or hamper the armed clandestine movement, has decided to concoct its own stories and perhaps even its own actions, to create cases against public elements of the independence movement.

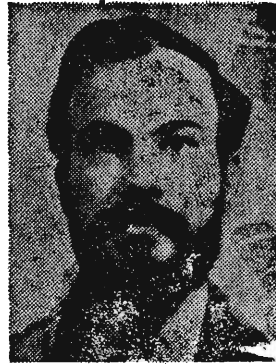
What is significant in this

light is that the U.S. was forced to drop the charges against two independentistas in another case it has spent almost two years trying to fabricate, for the hold-up of a Wells Fargo Bank in P.R.

This same strategy is being pursued in the U.S. On the very day of the sentencing of the Puerto Rican P.O.W.s on sedition charges, Chicago police arrested the brother of one of the Eleven, Felix Rosa, and another man at their homes on charges of participating in a supposed armed robbery attempt, based on mugshot identifications. Headlines about "FALN Associates Arrested" were flashed to the local media. Fifty demonstrators surrounded the police hq to denounce the frame-ups. At the same time, another local independentista was arrested at home on traffic warrants; a number of break-ins and other suspicious incidents have occurred, signalling a new step-up in repressive attacks.

Like the Muñiz attack, the sedition trial of the Puerto Rican P.O.W.s has proven to be a defeat and an embarrassment for the U.S. The ten facing the trial refused to participate, staging a hunger strike with support in mailgrams from all over the country which forced presiding Judge Thomas McMillan to end the inhuman treatment they were receiving during the trial and allow them to meet and visit with supporters and legal advisers.

300 people demonstrated in Chicago for the opening of the trial on Feb. 3. This coincided with demonstrations across the U.S., Canada, Mexico and in Puerto Rico, where over 600 people attended a support activity addressed by Juan Antonio Corretjer and the 4 Nationalists. In New York, 100 protesters marched from the Federal court to the U.S. prison where grand jury resister Carlos Noya is being held. Two other demonstrations were held in Chicago during the course of the illegal trial, and during the same period the case of the Puerto Rican P.O.W.s was successfully taken to such national bodies as the Mobilization for Survival national convention and the first National Anti-Draft Conference.



Negron

Bi-lingual instructor Eddie Negron was unjustly transferred from his job at Tuley Middle School after his frame-up arrest by Chicago Police.

The tremendous support for the Eleven Puerto Rican P.O.W.s which continues to grow based on their principled stance is another reason the U.S. has resorted to these fabricated criminal charges against supporters.

This new wave of repression in P.R. and the U.S. has created a great need for funds to pursue the legal and political defense of the comrades who have been arrested. Money is needed for bail, lawyers, travel and other expenses. Contributions should be sent immediately to the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican P.O.W.s in c/o the New Movement.

Another important case demanding immediate action is that of Carlos Noya. After reporting that Carlos, who is being illegally held in exile in the U.S. for refusing to collaborate with a grand jury in P.R., had been returned to general population following a national telegram campaign on his behalf, we have found out that he is still being labelled a potential suicide, held in solitary and denied most visiting rights. This is a clear threat to the last person to see alive Angel Rodríguez Cristobal, another LSP member who was murdered in U.S. prison a year ago under similar conditions. His death was whitewashed as a suicide. Please send mailgrams immediately to U.S. Atty. General William French Smith at the Dept. of Justice in Washington, protesting these violations of Carlos Noya's rights at the Metro. Correc. Ctr. in NYC and demanding his immediate repatriation to Puerto Rico. ■

WESTTOWN CABARET TALENT SHOW **WHAT WE ARE DOING**

Friday, March 6, 7:30 pm
1305 N. Hamlin, \$5 donation

WOMEN AND THE PUERTO RICAN
INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT
Sunday, March 8, 5:00 pm
Women & Children First Books
922 W. Armitage
Internat'l Women's Day Event

CIMARRON CULTURAL GROUP
Direct from Puerto Rico
with Brunilda Garcia
Saturday, March 14, 7 pm
place to be announced

MIDWEST REGIONAL ANTI-NUKE
CONFERENCE, Chicago On
Friday, March 13, Lewis
College on March 14 - 15
workshops on impact of
nuclear cycle on Puerto
Rico and on Chicano/Mexi-
cano land and water rights.

WOMEN'S PARTY BENEFIT
Sponsored by Women's Comm.
in Solidarity w/ P.R. Indep.
Friday, March 27, 8:00 pm
place to be announced

JUAN ANTONIO CORRETJER,
Secretary-General, L.S.P.
speaking on Betances, Albizu,
Lenin and the new stage of
Puerto Rican Independence
Friday, April 3, 6:00 pm
place to be announced

POLITICAL/CULTURAL EVENING
In Solidarity with Puerto
Rican Independence
Place: Blue Gargoyle
57th & S. University
Exact date and time to be
announced

BENEFIT HOUSE PARTY
In solidarity with the
Chicano/Mexicano Liberation
Struggle Friday, April 10
Place to be announced

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDAR-
ITY WITH THE CHICANO-MEXICANO
LIBERATION STRUGGLE
Friday, May 1, El Paso, TX
Ciudad Juarez, Mexico
Buses and carpools will be
leaving from all parts of U.S.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

WRITE TO THE PRISONERS. Their addresses are available in back issues.
SEND A MAILGRAM TO ATTY. GEN. SMITH. (See story in this issue's update.)
SET UP A HOUSE MEETING OR SLIDESHOW. Or arrange for a speaker to come
to your group, or for an article to be printed in your paper.
JOIN US. In Chicago, the New Movement is working at U of I Circle, North-
Eastern, Northwestern, U of Chi, and Roosevelt U.; and in the women's,
anti-draft and anti-nuke movements. Help build this important work.
MAKE A PLEDGE. There is a constant, urgent need for funds to support the
Puerto Rican independence movement against attacks by the U.S. Become
a monthly sustainer or subscribe to the newsletter by sending in this form:
() Enclosed is a donation of \$ ____ to aid the independence struggle.
() I would like to arrange for a speaker or slideshowing.
() Please put me on your mailing list for more information.
() I am interested in the May First Day of Solidarity with Chicano/Mexi-
cano Liberation Struggle.

NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____
CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____ PHONE: _____

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