

Self Determination for Puerto Rico

by Julio Urrutia, Syracuse Peace Council Steering Committee Member

The National Boricua Human Rights Network has written a sign-on letter to Senator Schumer and Speaker Pelosi to show broad progressive support for H.R. 8113, The Puerto Rico Self Determination Act (<https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr8113/BILLS-116hr8113ih.pdf>), introduced by Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nydia Velazquez.

The bill pushes against the narrative that the November referendum in Puerto Rico produced a mandate for statehood. Members of the progressive community are being asked to consider signing on to this letter. For more information on the bill and the wider political context, refer to this [article](#) and this [video](#). The bill is being revised and will be reintroduced soon.

The Syracuse Peace Council recently signed on to this letter and we ask you to support it too – and this is why.

Puerto Rico is the worlds oldest colony. For over 400 years it was the colonial possession of Spain. In 1898, Puerto Rico became a colony of the US when the island was invaded by the US during the Spanish-American War.

In 1900, Congress passed the Foracker Act which established civilian government in Puerto Rico to succeed the military regime which ruled since the invasion. The new civil government left control in US hands with the governor and the majority of the civilian council appointed by the US.

Puerto Rico did not elect a governor until 1948..

In 1917, The Jones-Shafroth Act imposed US citizenship on Puerto Ricans. Since then, Puerto Ricans have been second class citizens. Puerto Ricans on the islands cannot vote for President but can be sent to fight in wars by the President and in fact, Puerto Ricans have fought in every war since WWI to the present. Puerto Ricans have a non-voting Resident Commissioner in Congress.

I have voted in every election since turning 18 but if I moved to Puerto Rico, I cannot vote in Presidential elections.

The people of Puerto Rico have struggled and fought to remove the chains of colonialism and exercise their inalienable right to self determination first against Spain and then US colonial rule.

In 1868, Puerto Ricans rebelled against Spanish colonial rule in what is known as El Grito de Lares. Puerto Rican patriots declared the Republic of Puerto Rico to be a free and sovereign nation. The rebellion was crushed by the Spanish army after three days.

In 1950, under the leadership of Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party, Puerto Ricans again rose up and fought against colonial rule and for Puerto Rican independence in what is known as the Jayuya Uprising. The uprising was put down by the Puerto Rican national guard and the US military. Bombs were dropped on the city of Utuado - the first time bombs were dropped on US citizens.

The colonial status of Puerto Rico has been at the center of the political, economic and social life of the people of Puerto Rico. The debate has revolved around three options: the current colonial status of commonwealth, statehood, and independence. Under US colonial rule periodic referendums have been held on the political status of Puerto Rico. These non-binding referendums have been criticized by advocates of independence as unreliable, unfair and illegal in part because of the historical repression of the Puerto Rican independence movement by the US government. The last referendum was held in November 2020, with the only option being "Should Puerto Rico be immediately admitted as a state." For an in-depth discussion on the flaws of his recent plebiscite see "Independence Is the Progressive Solution to US Colonialism in Puerto Rico" by Margaret Powers in Truthout (<https://truthout.org/articles/independence-is-the-progressive-solution-to-us-colonialism-in-puerto-rico/>).