How Puerto Rico Is a Victim of Imperialism

By George Lavan

Juan Mari Bras, who granted The Militant the following interview, is president of the Movimiento Pro Independencia (Movement of Puerto Rico), which calls itself the "Free Associated State." But it is just a variation of the same kind of a colony that we always have. The same kind: the original governmental powers in the country are directly exercised by the government here, and without any approval or participation of the Puerto Rican people. Historically, this is the same as any colony for investment of American capital, "Paradise of Investment." Militarily, we are a base of the United States military. We have about ten bases, naval, air and military. They include guided missiles installations, and some have atomic weapons. This military existence is the headquarters of both the Army and the Air Force. And that means 13 per cent of the area of the island is occupied and de-ducted to U.S. military installations.

Q. Could you describe in general the living conditions of the people? How big a population is it?

A. It is two and one half million. And it is a very thin, very thin population. It gives a complete view of the population of the United States that has gone from the two to the one and half million living on a land area of 5,000 square kilometers, or roughly 3,500 square miles.

Q. What state in the union would be comparable to be in?

A. Delaware. Our living conditions to those figures can give you an idea. Our governor said in the last message to the legislature our average income per family is $2,295. Last year, but I am not sure the figures are not exaggerated. He didn't break that down. And everyone on the island in the families of Puerto Rico have an income of less than $1,000 a year, and with this income there are more than six persons per family.

Q. How does the population have its living conditions? How is the country; farm workers as opposed to the urban workers?

A. There has been a great migration of people who live in the country, the city, farm workers as opposed to the urban workers.

A. There have been a great migration of people who live in the country, the city, farm workers as opposed to the urban workers. In the last 30 years, in 1950 about 70 per cent of the population of the island was living in the country, about half and half. Half of the population were living in the city, and half in the cities and most of this rural population were working for seasonal workers of the sugar industry that work three or four months a year in the sugar harvest.

And they come to the United States to the fields of the Middle West with contracts that are slave labor contracts. They come and stay there for two, three and four months and come back to Puerto Rico with all they earn. They send money all the time that they save to their families, and the sugar companies take what they earn and pay the debts that the families have. And in the end, the families are still in debt. And so this is the way politicians come to the United States and state that the only discussion is: "We are talking about the greatlands on the island, and the great small farmers owning small farms." But after the sugar monopolies came to the island and all the industries, all the banks and sugar companies took the land from the peasants and consolidated those great sugar enclaves and today practically all of the land is owned by the sugar companies.

Q. What about the result of the political activities of the people?

A. Industrial enterprises are mostly owned by United States interests. Even those industries that were a few years ago in the hands of Puerto Rican capitalists have been transferred to American capitalists, like the rum industry for instance. One of the most profitable industries in Puerto Rico since the war has been the rum. Well, in the last few years, Seagram Corporation took over all the main rum factories of Puerto Rico.

Q. Could you give me an outline of the history of the Movimiento Pro Independencia? What it was founded, what it stands for?

A. Our organization was founded in 1936, the eleventh of January, ten days after Fidel Castro formed the movement in Cuba.

Q. Was this a coincidence?

A. In a way it was a coincidence. We found that we shared a common dependence movement has been growing gradually by the fact of the victory in Cuba in 1959. We have been a force that have been a force of the Movement of July since Fidel was in the towns. We were part of the independence movement of Puerto Rico, we were part of the Puerto Rican committee that was raising funds for the 36th of July Movement in Puerto Rico and giving support to that.

Q. In November of 1960 we organized in a small convention, a congress to establish a non-partisan political party. What was the establishment of a non-partisan political party in Puerto Rico. We have in our party a great number of small groups, organizations and different sorts of organizations with the people of the United States. We are working towards the unification of the peoples of Latin America. An equal association with the people of the United States would make Puerto Rico could reach a situation similar to the colonies of England today that are now in a very strong middle-class commonwealth of nations. We are also in the struggle to bring the people of Puerto Rico to a reality that is not legally possible within the framework of the constitutional system of the United States. It is only in the struggle to bring the people from supporting the right only that we have. That is the right to independence. But now the whole thing is coming to a climax because Congress will have to say now it is willing to offer this kind of association to Puerto Rico. I am sure that Congress will offer that and the people of Puerto Rico will then be convinced that the only alternative to colonial status is independence.

Q. Do you think this projected plebiscite will be the issue around which the future of the island, the attitude and the people of Puerto Rico will revolve?

A. That's right. Congress has been asked by a resolution of the legislative body of Puerto Rico to speak as the government of Puerto Rico.

Q. What do you mean to carry on all this activity without any interference, do you have complete, the whole country?

A. No, we are very greatly involved in the existing situation by the FBI and the police, the enforcement of their activities. And we have the police checking everyone who en- ters. Several arrests have been taken place. We have de- clared them publicly several times.

Q. The attitude of many Americans towards Puerto Rico is that they are Americans if they have Puerto Rican citizenship. What is your reaction?

A. They say that they have Puerto Rican citizenship. They say that the majority of the people of Puerto Rico want dependen-

Q. Are you aware of this movement that is specifi- cally a Puerto Rican movement and why is there so much resistance to it?

A. Yes, once they are confronted with the fact of a real alternative to independence or the possibility of a broad movement of Latin Americans, then it is understandable. The anti-American and the anti-imperialist movement will be seen as a possibility.

The colonial forces have created illusions in the people of Puerto Rico that makes some people, great sectors of the masses of the people, believe that it is possible to reach a state of equal-