Firsthand report by Juan Mari Bras on the Puerto Rican independence fight

By DERRICK MORRISON

NEW YORK—"The government has tried to put the people to panic. But all of the rallies and demonstrations after March 11 demonstrate that the people are not afraid," said Juan Mari Bras, secretary-general of the Movimiento Pro Independencia de Puerto Rico (Pro-Independence Movement of Puerto Rico, MPI), in a March 19 interview with The Militant.

Mari Bras, in New York to relate the most recent attacks on the independence movement in Puerto Rico, talked about the "March 23 power March" and the events at the University of Puerto Rico and forthcoming activities of MPI.

He picked up the March 21 Claridad, clearly amended to omit the pictures of armed ROTC cadets and police on the Rio Piedras campus of UPR. Mari Bras said the pictures gave the lie to the government's claim that the police initially entered the campus unarmed and that the cadets had no weapons.

The police invasion grew out of an attack by the ROTC cadets on pro-independence students in the campus cafeteria. The subsequent clash left two police cadets and a ROTC cadre dead, with hundreds wounded.

Severe limitations had been placed on ROTC ever since last spring when the student vote in Puerto Rico for the removal of the program. The administration—obviously concerned about the needs of U.S. imperialism—did not consider the vote binding, but moved to restrict all ROTC functions to the military building. Thus, there were no marches, drills, or any other manifestation of training on the Rio Piedras campus. And according to Mari Bras, there are no more than 100 cadets out of a campus population of 26,000.

On April 3, cadets out of a campus population of 2,600 were blockaded in their offices.

Mari Bras put special emphasis on the upcoming May Day celebration, part of what MPI proclaims as the "Year of the organization of workers." This event is being organized by the MPI through a united-front formation called the Movimiento Acción Sindical (Trade Union Action Movement, MAS). MPI has begun to organize workers inside and outside the traditional unions—into the independence movement.

"I return to the island of Culebra, where the U.S. Navy uses one-third of the land for target practice by its ships and planes. They say MPI has an active brigade organizing the people there." This is in preparation for the June naval maneuvers. During Navy maneuvers last January, pro-independence forces conducted a protest demonstration. This had a very dampening effect on naval operations. The Culebrans are therefore well organized for the maneuvers. The coupling of this demand to the move for independence has put the Navy on the defensive.

Right now Mari Bras is trying to raise funds for the students arrested on March 11. Contributions can be sent to: Casa Puerto Rico, 106 E. 14th St., New Y o rk, N.Y. 10003.

In addition to the students arrested and beaten on March 11, an ominous incident occurred when police and undercover agents brutally assaulted a Puerto Rican lawyer who had come to the police station to try and help the students.

The lawyer, Roberto Jose Maldonado, was told of student being beaten by the police. As he related in an interview in Claridad, "I went in person to the place where I witnessed students being beaten with sticks, pipes and switches. Their screams could be heard in the distance."

When he asked about the students, he was told to leave. Upon his refusal to do so, Maldonado was set upon by police and undercover agents. He doesn't know how long the beating lasted because he was knocked out and unconscious at one point. But he does remember groups of police arguing over whether to kill him right then and there.

As a result of the beating, Maldonado is temporarily paralyzed in both legs and has dizzy spells. He is going to bring charges against the police, and a group of lawyers are demanding that the bar investigate the assault.

Struggle of Argentine workers

Repression of protests during a one-day general strike in Córdoba, Ar­ gentina, March 12 touched off a new explosion of student opposition. In 1969, in May 1969 was the scene of a mass­ive workers uprising. The first Córdoba rebellion was the high point of popular unrest that led ultimately to the removal on June 9, 1970, of Ger­ man Juan Ongania, who had been designated president by the military.

The recent social explosion in this city, incident to the military to remove Ongania's successor, General Levingston, after only nine months in of­fice. The third military dictator in a period of one year, General José de la Mata, who headed the military junta that took over by Ongania, faced the state of emergency in Córdoba proclaimed by the Levingston regime and abolished the 19% wage-increase ceiling set by Levington.

The new regime's attempt to impose wage controls despite a gallopp­ing inflation (20 percent last year and 10 percent in the first two months of 1971) was apparently one of the primary causes of the popularity uprising in Córdoba, since the prestige of the military government seems to have been a strong contributing fac­tor.

The April 3 New York Times re­ported that the Lanusse government has also moved to legalize the activity of political parties, for the first time since 1966. It was not clear, how­ever, whether this decree would include the legalization of left-wing parties.

The uprising leading to the coup against Ongania included demands for a general strike protesting the appointment of a hated reacionary, Osvaldo Cevallos, as minister of the city of Córdoba. Other issues of the general strike included demands for general wage increases and support for the struggle of civil service workers in the province.

On March 10, the Unión Industrial (Manufacturers' Union) sent a tele­gram to Levingston appealing to the government to "protect private prop­erty." The union threatened that occupations of factories and stores during the strike could not be tolerated.

Levingston immediately decreed a 15% wage rise for civil service works­ters in the province and at the same time threatened that he would "force local security forces and, if necessary, the armed forces to quell any "sub­versive activity."

"As was to be expected," reported the March 16-22 Buenos Aires weekly Granen, "there were disturbances from the beginning, after a brief assembly, the majority of workers decided to con­tinue the strike." When the police attacked, the anarchists among them joined the activists who built barricades, burned a diesel locom­otive and a railway car, and set fire to a half-wrecked truck and hun­dreds of trees and posts.

Cops attack Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico March 11.

On Saturday afternoon, 600 dele­gates of the Córdoba regional coun­cil of the CGT (General Confeder­ation of Labor) met and voted to is­ue a call for new general strikes March 15 and 17.

Reported in the international press indicate that renewed attempts to sup­press the workers movement through­out the week of March 15-18 ignited a massive struggle. An estimated $4- million worth of property was de­stroyed in violent clashes between the repressive forces and the protesters. The March 17 issue of the Paris weekly Le Monde reported that 60 per­sons were wounded, 10 of whom were shot, 300 persons were arrested, 500 cars were burned, six banks were at­tacked with Molotov cocktails, and 50 stores were looted.

At the beginning of April, it was not clear whether formation of the new government had halted the fi­nessing of the armed forces that pro­duced the state of a number of cities andcountercities in the period lead­ing up to the overthrow of Leving­ston. It seemed likely, however, that after four years of ruling through the military, the bourgeoisie was anx­ious to return to some kind of par­liamentary system where their debates over strategy would not threaten to generate armed conflicts between up­posing factions of the repressive forces.

THE MILITANT/ APRI L 16, 1971 21