

Interview With an Independence Leader

# Some Facts About Conditions in Puerto Rico

By Hedda Grant

"I feel so strongly about this that I have hoped before I die I could see it written down somewhere. I believe that one of the biggest monuments to Fidel Castro will be built in the United States. The Cuban Revolution means the happiness of America in a new era of socialization, and the spot where the struggle will be the hardest is going to be in the United States — for the United States will be part of this big battle.

"Since it is here the biggest sacrifices and acts of heroism will be, the day that the new era succeeds in the States there will be a very strong feeling about the symbols of the whole process. The struggle here will take brains, blood and hearts, and a monument will be erected to the man who put the first stone in that reconstruction — Fidel Castro."

The above words were spoken not by a Cuban, but by Gabriel Vincente Maura, a leader of the Puerto Rican independence movement, who was visiting New York in his capacity as Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the *Movimiento Pro-Independencia* of Puerto Rico when he was interviewed by *The Militant*.

Maura has been in the struggle for Puerto Rico's independence his entire adult life. Born in Guayama, a small coastal city in Puerto Rico, he learned about the colonial status of his country from his mother, who even then was an *independista*. Now in his fifties and a small businessman, Maura sees the independence movement growing rapidly since the Cuban Revolution.

The *Movimiento Pro-Independencia*, founded three years ago, now has branches throughout Puerto Rico and many young people have joined in its ranks with old-time fighters like Maura. This group works fraternally with the Nationalists and the *Accion Patriotica Unitaria* (APU) for the goal of their country's independence. "We are in a common struggle," says Maura, "We each use different methods toward the same purpose."

Although the U.S. government claims that Puerto Rico is no longer a colony but a free commonwealth associated with the U.S., Maura can see no difference. "We all know what happens when countries are retained as colonies. In Puerto Rico 78 per cent of the money is invested by United States investors; 22 per cent of the investors are Puerto Rican." As in other colonies, the foreign investors show little regard for the natural resources or the future economic needs of the colony.

Operation Bootstrap, the much publicized program of industrializing the island and the U.S. answer to social change, doesn't in the least change Maura's conviction that his country must be free from the colonial yoke.

### New Industry

Saying that Operation Bootstrap has "done much," he asks that it be examined more closely. New industry has come, but the best jobs in it have gone to Americans who are brought along, not to Puerto Ricans. "After the war many of the developments would have happened anyway without it. The new industry is only possible in the transitory circumstances where the U.S. is producing mainly for war and semi-war circumstances. But if the U.S. has to become normal or there is a depression, Operation Bootstrap will be impossible."

As "big black spots" in Operation Bootstrap, Maura cites the half-million Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the U.S. despite the plan. "The Puerto Ricans do not come here because they like living in dirty houses and working as dishwashers, but because there are too few opportunities in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico if a man makes \$45 a week he can buy everything he needs on credit. But most can't find jobs or don't even make that much and have to stay in a shack or come to the United States."

As to the much-touted new housing projects in Puerto Rico, Maura points out that the building boom has slowed down although many slums still stand. The housing projects themselves are an example of the social problems created by "turning Puerto Rico into an industrial country without any preparation."

In Maura's part of the island he has seen many cases of things like this: "A carpenter, his wife and children move into a project. Before that they lived in the country and the wife ironed her own clothes and the clothes of Mrs. So-and-So for a little money. She also used to buy one or two dozen avacados and sell them in front of her house. She cannot do this in the project and now she has rent to pay. Before she lived in a shack but had no rent. Her husband earns no more than he did before."

### Relative Income

"There is too much talk about the new relative income," Maura adds, and he ridicules statistics which average in the new small group of wealthy people, raising the relative income far above its real increase. He says that the American companies are the only ones that have become wealthy. They get ten years tax free and when that period is over they can leave (taking all their equipment with them) or merely change the company's name or product slightly and become eligible for ten more tax free years as a "new" company.

The United States considers Muñoz Marin, the island's present governor, a reliable and consistent friend. According to Maura, Marin was instrumental in tricking the Puerto Rican people into accepting their colonial status. Maura backs this charge with numerous stories of promises broken and letters suppressed, demonstrating how Marin gained support by pretending to be for independence.

The *Movimiento Pro-Independencia* believes that the real issue is independence, but that no plebiscite can genuinely reflect the wishes of the Puerto Rican people. "The United States took possession of Puerto Rico with bullets, not ballots. They have given us 64 years of 'training' to become Americans and so a plebiscite under the present circumstances would have only one result." The government of Muñoz Marin has made clear that it favors commonwealth status, which, according to Maura, is simply an "official name for colonialism." The schools, newspapers, radio, movies, all of the apparatus speaks out against independence.

When Maura attended school all subjects were taught in English. "I even learned French from an American teacher and we were asked to talk to our classmates and teachers in English — even during recess. This reflects now because the people important in government, social and business life, are the people who were trained."

In 1943 the law was changed and Spanish was made the official language. But the "people who have been taught the new way are still very young, they are the people of a new era."

### Pedro Albizu Campos

Maura has often heard people say that Albizu Campos destroyed confidence in the independence movement with violence and terrorism. But he says, "Every sensitive person in Puerto Rico has great respect for Albizu Campos. The lies about him were spread during the whole witch-hunt period when we had no means to answer on radio or television."

Despite the effects of the "training," Maura believes that "if the channels for democracy were free a great majority would be for independence. Scratch a Puerto Rican who says that he wants to be an American and underneath he is for independence. Even small businessmen — with the big stores from the U.S. taking away their business — feel that way. But

## Puerto Rican Salute to Cuba

[Almost a thousand people attended the assembly of the Pro-Independence Movement in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, on Dec. 9, 1962. Among resolutions adopted was the sending of the following message of greetings.]

The Fourth General Assembly of the Pro-Independence Movement sends its fraternal salute of solidarity to the Cuban People, to the Revolutionary Government and to its principal leader, Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, expressing the greetings of the Puerto Rican people struggling for independence on the basis of the extraordinary victory which Cuba has achieved over the forces of imperialism and because of its firm refusal to enter into any compact which would encroach in the slightest upon the integrity and national sovereignty of Cuba.

The firm Cuban position of forcing respect for its sovereignty and independence at the high price of risking the very life of all its citizens is an example of patriotism which history will glorify. Cuba has demonstrated that a small nation can rid itself of all satellitism and launch a foreign policy in accord with its freest principles.

North American insistence for on-site inspection of the dismantling of Soviet rockets on Cuban soil has been vigorously and definitively refused by the Cuban government despite all the pressure that was exerted on it by its enemies as well as friends.

Cuba has responded with the greatness expected of her by all the peoples of our America. Serene and happy, with the happiness and serenity of those who know themselves to have been faithful to a great historic destiny, the Cuban people has been, and will continue to be, prepared to resist unto death all foreign aggression.

The Puerto Rican independistas are grateful in the name of their country to the extraordinary service rendered by the Cuban people to the integrity of the Antilles and of all our America.

with military bases and the apparatus in Puerto Rico there is no free expression of democracy."

Statehood is seen by Maura as the end of "the human Puerto Rico." "If we are to join a group of nations it should have our own roots of language and culture. Statehood would mean the disappearance of both. The Puerto Rico that can be a state is geographical. The United States is a nation which is a national unit. If Puerto Rico joins we will have to melt into that unit. It is inconceivable that they would let two units exist."

None of the pro-independence groups functions as a party. It is almost impossible for them to run

in elections because the legal requirements are that people must sign for the party before a judge and members of opposition parties.

The *independistas* are understandably overjoyed at the example set by Fidel Castro for Latin America. Gabriel Vincente Maura points with an almost personal pride to Cuba's Revolution and no doubt believes that the man who fought for national independence, the right to be free of U.S.-brand colonialism will some day have a statue erected to him on Puerto Rican soil as well as in the U.S. But in true independent spirit, he adds, "The Cubans should have their own way of living. We do not necessarily have to copy it."

## ... Vietnam War

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when government forces attacked. This may mark an important tactical turning point in the war. The guerrillas held their fire until the helicopters had landed, then they opened up from four sides. "The Communist ground fire hit 14 American helicopters taking part in the operation that began at dawn — and brought down at least eight," reports a Jan. 2 AP dispatch. "Five were destroyed."

Though government forces outnumbered the guerrillas ten to one and were supported by planes, artillery and armor, Diem's troops refused direct orders to advance during the Jan. 2 battle UPI dispatches report that the U.S. military "advisers" were furiously angry. They charged that an American army captain was killed while out front vainly pleading with Diem's troops to advance.

In another case a Vietnamese battalion flatly refused to advance though U.S. officers ordered and pleaded for hours. In still another case the Vietnamese commander of an armored unit refused U.S. orders to go to the rescue of downed helicopters.

The enhanced fire power of the guerrillas comes from captured U.S. weapons. As AP correspondent Malcolm W. Browne reported on Jan. 5: "Only a few months ago the average Viet Cong guerrilla had to rely on his homemade shotgun or old French rifle to blast away at the big American machines wheeling down on him with loads of troops. Now thanks to captured American weapons, the guerrilla has a good chance of making trouble for the helicopters."

## World Events

### China-Japan Trade Urged

An Asian Common Market sponsored by China and Japan was proposed Jan. 4 by Kazuo Suzuki, a Japanese trade leader who heads the Japan China Trade Promotion Association.

He said the 700 members of his organization in Japan would bring pressure on their government for early conclusion of a trade pact with China. Japan, he said, is eager to buy iron ore, coke and soy beans from China and, in return, sell machinery, fertilizer, oil products and chemicals.

Japanese productive capacity far exceeds its market, Suzuki said, and only a giant market like China is the solution to Japanese economic problems.

### Mexicans Seize Land

"Squatters from the Mexican state of Coahuila and Durango are reported infiltrating into southern Chihuahua to help invade big ranching properties," reports a Jan. 8 AP dispatch.

"Leaders of the land grab," the report continues, "say their action is an outgrowth of continued appeals to the federal government for land on which to work. They say the federal Department of Agrarian Affairs and Colonization . . . has completely ignored their demands."

A principal target of the squatters' movement, which seems to number well over several hundred, are the fabulous ranches of former President Miguel Aleman and other government figures who have acquired huge holdings.

The report said that new inva-

sions of ranches was reported in the Madera area where five ranches were seized, all reportedly owned by North Americans.

### Soviet Boosts Oil Output

The Soviet Union reports that it produced nearly a billion and a half barrels of oil last year, a gain of 11 per cent over 1961. This puts the USSR in second place behind the U.S. among the world's oil producers.

### Burmese Students' Siege

At year's end students at Rangoon University in Burma were maintaining a state of siege in protest against the military government of General Ne Win. They have won demands, including release of students jailed by the government and compensation for the families of 16 students killed in last July's protest, but they are holding out for recognition of their dormitory unions.

The government refuses to recognize the Students Union, the Dec. 21 *Christian Science Monitor* explained, because it is "aware that such organizations produced the Burmese leaders who fought for and won independence from the British after the war."

### What GIs Died for in Korea

Top civilian politicians in South Korea charge that the ruling military junta is making it virtually impossible for an effective opposition party to emerge and contest in the election due in three months. They are demanding that 2,900 political prisoners be released and the election be delayed.

### India Wants China in UN

India's ambassador to the U.S., declared Jan. 4 that despite the border conflict with China his country still favors China's admission to the UN. While lashing out at China on the border issue, the ambassador declared: "We still feel that every nation should be represented in the UN . . . We feel that the world's problems cannot be solved by the UN without representation of one fifth of mankind."

### Priests Organize

Orthodox priests who have been staging marches and demonstrations in Greece against starvation wages have started organizing a union, according to the World Council of Churches. Their goal is "to bring pressure on political leaders to increase their salaries which range from \$6.50 a week for a priest with primary education to \$12.80 for university graduate students in theology."

A key pamphlet  
**In Defense of the Cuban Revolution**  
 An Answer to the State Department and Theodore Draper  
 By Joseph Hansen  
 32 pages 25¢  
**PIONEER PUBLISHERS**  
 116 University Place  
 New York 3, N. Y.