

First National Conference in Support of Vieques On the Left and Unity in Puerto Rico

The 1st National Conference in Support of Vieques (PENAV), which took place on March 29th at the Lawyers Bar Association in San Juan, Puerto Rico, was a very significant event. Its significance lay in what it revealed about the present state of the independence and revolutionary movement on the island: the level of division in the movement and the different concepts regarding work in united fronts.

For these and other reasons to be discussed below, we feel that the results and implications of the PENAV are still valid. This is particularly so for the progressive and solidarity movements in the U.S. that lack an understanding of the above-mentioned aspects of the Puerto Rican reality. This is why we decided to publish this article.

All the sectors of the national liberation movement in Puerto Rico agree that the struggle to get the U.S. Navy out of Vieques is an integral part of the Puerto Rican's struggle for self-determination and independence. But serious differences exist among the organizations and individuals who do Vieques work about the character of that work and how it should be developed. These differences are also reflected by the organizations and individuals in the U.S. that do Vieques solidarity work. In Puerto Rico, these differences are a serious obstacle to the creation of a broad-based support movement for Vieques. Such a broad-based movement is necessary to oust the Navy from Vieques and thus advance the process of national and social liberation.

It is essential that revolutionary and progressive elements in the U.S. that do Puerto Rico solidarity work critically examine the state of the island's revolutionary movement. In this way our support can correspond to its needs and level of development. We in MINP-El Comité recognize that one of our responsibilities is to raise the level of consciousness of the Northamerican people—and in particular the working class—about the Puerto Rican struggle for liberation. This is the context for our work in solidarity with Puerto Rico. This is why it is important to examine the evaluation of the PENAV conference made by different sectors of the independence and revolutionary movement and to relate these to work in support of Vieques.

The articles in the May-June 1980 issue of *Pensamiento Crítico* (PC), and in the April-May issue of *Ira Popular*, official organ of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR), entitled "National Conference in Defense of Vieques: Sectarian Organization vs.



In the United States, grass roots work is fundamental in order to create a mass movement supporting Vieques which will be based in the working class—in particular within the Puerto Rican and Hispanic communities.

Broad Front," are two of the sources that we cite in the following article. Our other sources are two members of our Central Committee that attended the PENAV and the experiences of many of our cadre in their Vieques support work in this country.

The PENAV was sponsored by the Crusade to Rescue Vieques, an organization that works mainly in Vieques; more than 700 people were present. At the conference, the Crusade presented a proposal to create a broad-based organization that would unite all the organizations and individuals willing to do Vieques support work.

It was clear to the majority of the participants of the PENAV that the Crusade's proposal was objectively an attempt to substitute or eliminate the National Committee in Defense of Vieques (CNPDV). The National Committee is composed of different sectors of the independence movement and the Puerto Rican left. It has developed the work in support of Vieques in Puerto Rico.

When people at the Conference proposed the need to discuss and revise the Crusade's proposal, the leadership of the Crusade assumed an inflexible position: the proposal had been formulated by the Crusade alone and therefore could not be discussed or changed by the people assembled.

The PC article presented the following analysis: "The Crusade's rigid position caused an immediate reaction from the vast majority of those present. After an intense debate, a vote was taken which favored further discussion of the proposal. . . . In spite of the Crusade's position and the intervention of some high-level Puerto Rican

Socialist Party (PSP) leaders (in favor of the Crusade's position, ed.) the proposal did not gain any supporters. After the time was up for the pro and con arguments, Luis Angel Torres, secretary-general of the Popular Socialist Movement (MSP) presented a compromise motion which gained the support of the absolute majority present. This motion called for the creation of a committee made up of 3 Crusade delegates and 3 National Committee delegates who would be responsible for drafting a unifying proposal for the reorganization of the National Committee into a broad-based organization."

The *Ira Popular* article presented the following analysis of the conference: "It is obvious that the PSP used its influence with various Crusade leaders to push through a proposal that would create a new Vieques support organization in Puerto Rico, ignoring the National Committee and developing parallel to it. This was unacceptable to the rest of us in Puerto Rico who have militantly supported the Vieques struggle and . . . who have participated in the different activities of the CNPDV in spite of differences we have raised in that organization. This was the basis for the alliance of those forces which opposed the Crusade's proposal. In our opinion the Crusade made a grave error. But we must also criticize and condemn the hysterical, anarchistic and abusive behavior of some of those present at the conference. We saw and heard how insulting epithets were hurled at the front table where the Viequesens were seated. The Viequesens left the conference thinking that they had been treated

as enemies."

The Left and Unity in Puerto Rico

The above passage gives us a view of the high level of sectarianism which exists within the Puerto Rican left. The passage also gives us a view of the balance of forces in the left. Most of the 700 participants of the conference were not affiliated to any organization. This non-affiliated sector has become increasingly important in the independence movement as was seen by their participation in the conference, where their numbers was decisive in the approval of the compromise proposal.

We have to raise the question—what makes sectarianism and divisionism the dominant characteristics of the Puerto Rican left at this moment? Why hasn't the left been able to build the principled unity necessary to deal with the tactical-programmatic issues presented by the country's reality—for example, Vieques?

Two elements provide the answers to these questions. First, the Puerto Rican national liberation movement does not share a common vision of the revolutionary process in Puerto Rico. Thus, the different views clash on tactical issues. Second, we have to consider the collaborationist policies of certain sectors of the independence movement. Guided by the goal of gaining the support of the leaders of the colonial parties (PNP and PPD), these sectors have totally glossed over or denied the differences that exist within the revolutionary movement. This is done in the name of unity but results in the opposite—raising the level of frustration and division among the forces which honestly look for a principled unity. In this sense we agree with PC when it says: "... one can not allow the debate (over Vieques, ed.) among the advanced sectors of our people to hide the real differences which underlie such a discussion. These differences point to more fundamental differences over what is the actual state of the struggle and the level of development of the different organizations which make up the country's revolutionary movement."

Broadening the Vieques Support Work

The debate referred to by PC is the one over the different conceptions within the Puerto Rican movement on how to massify the Vieques support work. It is important to point out that although the Vieques support work has been developed in great part by independentistas, they did not announce their political beliefs at first. It was only after several years of work, particularly in Vieques, and after proving themselves to the Viequeses as individuals committed to the struggle, did the fact that they were independentistas come to light.

But let us return to the point of broadening the movement. The broadness of any front of struggle is determined by the political objectives and principles that guide it as well



as by the sectors that want to mobilize through the front. All the sectors of the Puerto Rican left agree that to get the U.S. Navy out of Vieques they have to go beyond the independentista sector, which up to now has participated in and directed this work. This work has to be broadened so that large sectors of the Puerto Rican people which belong to the colonial parties but sympathize with the justice of the Viequeses' struggle would be incorporated effectively until eventually achieving the Navy's ouster.

For those that direct the Vieques support work this objective implies—when dealing with the politics that will guide the struggles' fronts—a careful analysis of the level of consciousness and organization of the masses that they want to attract and incorporate into the work. Because of this we disagree with the compañeros of PC when they maintain that "... We understand that in order to attract the hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans that belong to or sympathize with the colonial parties—but who have real contradictions with imperialism and whose level of consciousness and/or intuition tends to recognize the justice of this struggle—it is not necessary or essential to hide the anti-colonialist nature of this struggle nor beg for the support of the colonial parties' leadership ... This objective could be reached as the existing organizations, the Crusade and the National Committee in particular, overcome their sectarian subjectivity, coordinate their efforts, and implement a structure that allows them to channel the participation of the people at all levels."

Anti-imperialist work, as we understand it, is directed towards the most politically advanced sectors. We believe that the compañeros of PC are confusing two different levels of work. On the one hand there's the Puerto Rican left's need to develop independent political activities around Vieques and through these pose the issues of

anti-imperialism and independence. On the other hand, there is the problem of how to win over the broad masses of Puerto Ricans to the support of Vieques.

The strong ideological control that imperialism maintains over Puerto Ricans—which in the last few years has been reinforced by the great sums of money for food stamps and other programs designed to perpetuate this ideological dependence—is a factor that should not escape the independentistas' analysis of the reality of the Puerto Rican masses. The compañeros in PC only propose that the Puerto Rican reality is that of a colonized people and so in the Vieques support work, one has to talk about colonialism and imperialism. But they ignore the level of consciousness and organization of the Puerto Rican masses. That is why we totally agree with *Ira Popular's* position: "... Everyone recognizes the vast moral support and sympathy that the Vieques struggle has in significant sectors of our people. Our organization believes that the central task of a broad Vieques support front is to transform this sympathy and moral support into concrete and material support. One thing is how revolutionaries view the Vieques struggle and a different thing is how our people, particularly the Viequeses, view it. It's clear to us that to get the Navy out of Vieques is an integral part of the struggle to expel from our shores all the economic, political and military apparatus of U.S. imperialism and its backyard puppets. But we cannot confuse our level of consciousness with that of the masses since this could easily alienate us from them, divorcing our actions from theirs."

Vieques Support Work in the United States

Those of us in the U.S. involved in solidarity work around Vieques are faced

with a very complex reality. The discussion on broadness, on the different conceptions of developing solidarity work, on the role of Republicans and Democrats in this work, and on how to incorporate the religious and student sectors that are neither anti-imperialist nor socialist, are all part of our reality.

The existing conceptions in Puerto Rico on Vieques support work have their counterparts here in the U.S. The experiences of the solidarity movement here with Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries have shown this. We will cite some recent examples of our experiences in Vieques solidarity work.

There are still sectors in the U.S. proposing that the Vieques support movement cannot grow or meet its responsibilities without raising the struggle of Vieques as an integral part of the struggle for independence against U.S. imperialism. Other sectors maintain that support for the armed struggle is an indispensable part of education and agitation around Vieques.

These sectors separate their analysis and their work from a concrete understanding of the level of consciousness and organization of the U.S. people and the Puerto Rican community in particular. But they also confuse the responsibility of the most advanced and left sectors to develop their own independent work on the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle. In addition, they do not recognize in their practice the need to support and contribute to the development of a mass movement capable of giving the people of Vieques the political and material support that is possible and necessary.

The differences on the concepts of broadness—of participation and attitude towards the tactical fronts of struggle—are not as clearly manifested in the U.S. as in Puerto Rico. In the Vieques solidarity work here in the U.S., these debates have taken place in a roundabout way, i.e., the debate on lobbying work whose focus is to get the support on paper of "celebrities and personalities" among the politicians, the religious community, unions, etc. This has been presented as a priority area of work, counterposed to mass work in the community and with the rank and file of the institutions mentioned. Though we do not deny the importance of working with the leadership of churches, unions and others, we in MINP think that rank and file and community work is fundamental if our goal is to create a mass movement in support of Vieques among working people in general and the Puerto Rican community in particular.

As in Puerto Rico, the progressive sector in the U.S. that supports the island's independence is the guiding force of the Vieques solidarity work. Such is the case with the National Network in Support of Vieques and the N.Y. Committee in Support of Vieques. The difference lies in the fact that

through the practice of local groups, and their debates and discussions, it is clear that their priority is rank and file and community work. To achieve a movement in support of Vieques that is really broad and effective, it is indispensable to have coalitions, committees and collectives that implement their work plans with a clear understanding of the level of consciousness and organization among workers and other sectors in the U.S.

Although it is true that in Puerto Rico Vieques support is almost exclusively carried out by the left and the independence movement (as shown by the PENAV conference) the situation is different in the U.S. Here the progressive and left circles are an integral part of the structures that support Vieques, but only those sectors that historically have supported and mobilized for the Puerto Rican solidarity movement have been the back bone of support for Vieques at a national level. These forces, both political organizations and non-affiliated

individuals have been able to incorporate sectors to take up the issue of Vieques even though they have not been active around other issues related to Puerto Rico. This is seen through the resolutions and work that has been accomplished. A good understanding of the current reality in the U.S. as well as an understanding of the nature of the Vieques struggle and the kind of support work needed has been at the core of the work in the U.S.—particularly the work of the N.Y. Committee in Support of Vieques and other similar local groupings.

Our organization, MINP-El Comité, will continue its active support of the Vieques Solidarity Movement in the U.S., in particular the efforts of the N.Y. Committee. This work will be guided by the conceptions and priorities outlined above as well as by our understanding of the need to develop independent work around Vieques which addresses the broader political questions of independence, national liberation and the struggle against U.S. imperialism. □

Nicaraguan children now face a future free from hunger and ignorance.



Salute to Nicaragua

One year after the triumph of its Revolution, Nicaragua glows with the flame of social liberation. In a delicately balanced unity with liberal bourgeois forces, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación (FSLN) is beginning to lead the nation out of the underdevelopment left by more than 40 years of a dictatorship, and the devastation caused by the war.

Today 51% of the arable land and 150 businesses—the most basic sectors—are publicly owned. Workers in the public sector play a role in decision-making. Popular participation in the government is insured through the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS): Each CDS (block committee) elects a representative to a neighborhood committee which has direct links to the government ministries. Further mobilization and political education take place through the mass organizations, specifically the Nicaraguan Women's Association and the Sandinista Youth. Since over half of the population is illiterate, the national literacy campaign has become the first major task for the revolution. The FSLN has explained the importance of the campaign: "the literate person learns his intrinsic value as a person, as an historical subject ... as an individual with rights ... and obligations. ..." Internationally, Nicaragua has joined the Non-Aligned Movement and established relations with the socialist countries.

MINP-El Comité salutes free Nicaragua on its first anniversary, recognizing it, together with Cuba, as the vanguard of the Latin American Revolution. □