



¡El Coqui Libre!

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U.S. DOESN'T ALLOW PROGRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS IN THE REGION: OSCAR LOPEZ RIVERA!

By Aline Piva
Telesur (6 August 2017)

"They are taking money to pay off a debt, and that money could be used to help the university, to help in health care, to help generate jobs, but that is not happening," said the freedom fighter.

Oscar Lopez Rivera is one of the most important leaders of the independence movement of Puerto Rico. Born in Puerto Rico in 1943, he moved with his family to the United States in 1952. He began to gain popularity as an activist in the late 1960s when he actively participated in actions to institute bilingual teaching in public schools in the United States and with the Puerto Rican Armed Forces of National Liberation in the 70s.

In January 2017, in one of his last acts, former President Barack Obama granted the commutation of his sentence. Despite having spent a good part of his 36 years in solitary confinement, under conditions considered by international observers as "cruel and unusual," Lopez Rivera never let go of solidarity not only with his fellow comrades but also with resistance movements around the world. In this exclusive interview with Nocaute, Lopez Rivera takes stock of the struggle for independence of Puerto Rico and comments on the U.S. interference in Latin America.

Aline Piva: Well, first of all, I would like to thank you for being here speaking with us, with the people from Brazil and everyone. Really, Oscar, it's a great honor.

What I wanted to ask you is that in recent years we have seen that Puerto Rico has been facing, suffer-



Photo: Aline Piva with Oscar Lopez Rivera. Published 8/06.

ing a series of serious economic and social problems. Many believe that much of the problem is due to their colonial status. What do you think about the current situation? Is it not a sign of the necessity that the Puerto Rican people achieve their independence?

Oscar Lopez Rivera: Well, we've been fighting for Puerto Rico's independence for many years. Unfortunately, we face the strongest empire in the history of the world. It makes us difficult, especially when that country, which is the United States, has a force within Puerto Rico because it is the Puerto Ricans who help administer the colony. Then the United States dictates and those who administer the colony do it. In the specific case of today, the United States decided to impose a fiscal control board on the Puerto Rican people. This board has only one objective: to make Puerto Rico pay a debt that is odious, which many consider a criminal act, to take from the Puerto Rican people US\$72 billion, when we don't have a billion dollars to pay that debt. How is it possible for us, as Puerto Ricans, to pay that debt?

Well, what they are going to do is cut and cut programs. For example, cut

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from the University of Puerto Rico US\$500 million. Close public schools, for example, now in August, there are 169 public schools that are going to be closed. Without the university and without public schools, the future of Puerto Rico is highly threatened, because it is the schools, it is the universities that help us develop human resources, and that human resource is the most important in the world. If we do not have well-prepared human resources, we are failing, we are truly, in very bad condition.

Another thing: if you take capital from Puerto Rico, it gets poorer and poorer. Puerto Rican poverty today is much greater than it was 20 years ago. Puerto Rico is completely privatized. Before, it was part of the public sector, for example, the telephone company, it was government-owned, it was owned by the Puerto Rican people. However, today it is completely privatized. The airport of Puerto Rico is privatized, the road system is privatized. If a person moves from one town to another, he is paying, he has to pay, a tax on that transportation system. Just by transporting yourself, moving from one part to another in your own car, you have to pay for it.

The cost of living in Puerto Rico is much higher than the cost of living in the United States. The foreign capital generated in Puerto Rico automatically leaves Puerto Rico, is transferred. This capital does not remain in Puerto Rico. It has been a constant robbery. But now it is even worse, because they are taking money to pay off a debt, and that money could be used to help the university, to help in health care, to help generate jobs, but that is not happening.

AP: And that has a great social impact, right? We were talking a little bit about the diaspora, here in the United States, right?

OLR: Well, the worst thing that happened is the depopulation of Puerto Rico grew immensely. There are more Puerto Ricans living in the Puerto Rican diaspora than in Puerto Rico. But at the same time, in the last 15 or 20 years, the worst thing that happened is that the person who emigrates, who is being forced to emigrate because in Puerto Rico there is no work for him or her, is the brain drain that we suffer. The doctors, engineers, nurses, social workers architects all of the professional class are leaving.

One of the cruelest things in Puerto Rico, for example, is the problem of teachers. Almost every day we can see teachers who have to immigrate to the United States, because in Puerto Rico schools are closed. If there is no work for them, they have to come to work in the U.S. And it is a loss, a great loss we are suffering. Also in Puerto Rico, there is what is called gentrification. Gentrification is the construction of buildings, expensive condominiums, which are specially built for foreigners. The government - or those who run the colony, because there

is no government, let's be clear on that - those who administer the colony give incentives to those foreigners who don't have to pay taxes to buy in Puerto Rico. They buy and buy, but they are not paying any taxes for their entire life.

However, Puerto Ricans, if a Puerto Rican person buys a house, they have to pay tax. This is a big difference, and something that really affects us adversely. Puerto Rico, can not have any economic relations with foreign countries. Everything has to be bought in the United States. We can import food, for example, but we import 87 percent of what we consume. If you come from Costa Rica, that boat goes to the United States first and then to Puerto Rico. The lack of cabotage rights costs us about US\$6 billion annually. And that money goes out of the pocket of Puerto Ricans. This is a cruelty and it is a reality that adversely affects our economy.

AP: Exactly. We are seeing now in Latin America in general, we see that it is going through a series of changes where it seems that the conservative forces again are regaining strength, and we also see an increase in U.S. interventionism.

OLR: Well, the United States has a policy of not allowing progressive governments to come to power in our countries. For example, when (Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva) Lula aspired to the presidency of Brazil, the United States was completely opposed to his candidacy. They did the same thing in Argentina, the same they did in Bolivia, for example, against Evo Morales, a lot of work was done in the United States to prevent their election. The same happened with (Rafael) Correa in Ecuador, the same happened when (Hugo) Chavez came to power.

In addition, the United States was the only government that immediately recognized the military junta that tried to seize the government of Venezuela. The only country! And today, they continue with an accelerated process of intrusion, of interference, of trying to dictate to our countries what to do, this is what is happening. But it is very calculated, it is not accidental. It is a well-developed position, and we can already see how a government in Brazil, the government of (Mauricio) Macri in Argentina, were imposed and it looks to do the same wherever it can do. Because the U.S. does not want to allow another Venezuela; or another Lula; or the Kirchners, who did some good work in Argentina when they were in power; or another Morales in Bolivia; or another Correa in Ecuador to come to power. They do not want that. They will not allow progressive governments. They want oligarchies and they want those servile governments that generally represent their interests, they defend the interests not of their countries, not the interests, say, of Venezuela, but the interests of the oligarchy and of the United States.

AP: Oscar Lopez Rivera, thank you very much.

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THE BELL TOLLS, OR SHOULD, FOR ANA BELEN MONTES!

by Susan Babbitt , CounterPunch, July 17, 2017

At the World Social Forum at Puerto Alegre, Brazil, the late Nobel Prize Winner, José Saramago told the following story: In a village near Florence, Italy, in 800 A.D., church bells were rung whenever someone died. One day the bells rang and everyone returned from the fields. They looked to see who had died, but all were present. They asked the bell-ringer, “Who has died?” He said: “Justice has died”. [i]

What is expected of democracy and the Universal Declaration of Rights, Saramago pointed out, is “flowery, empty legalistic rhetoric” falling far short of the “rational, sensitive dignity we once assumed to be the supreme aspiration of humankind”. Just as in ancient times, the village church bell marked death, the bell must toll, loudly and persistently, the death of justice.

“Justice” that takes no issue with the single “economic power... managed by multinational corporations in line with strategies of domination that have nothing to do with the common good to which, by definition, democracy aspires” is not justice. It cannot be. It doesn’t apply to people, or to most.

It can’t recognize them. Saramago’s bell is metaphorical: It is well-known to philosophers and psychologists that we don’t learn when we think we already know. If you tell me why I shouldn’t step off the roof, I don’t listen. I don’t need to. To learn, I need to know that I don’t know – I need questions.

Knowledge isn’t power: If we can’t imagine what it explains, or might, or we don’t care, it’s useless.

Here’s another point about reason: We think according to expectations, arising from practises, that is, from how we live. Saramago refers to “some sort of verbal and mental automatism” arising from liberal institutions, that is, from liberal prac-



-tises, including ways of thinking. It means we don’t see certain “raw, naked facts.” We don’t expect them and therefore don’t see them, no matter the evidence.

Ana Belén Montes saw the facts. [ii] She cared. To see what we don’t expect, we have to care. We have to imagine what might be explained by those facts.

She’s been imprisoned since 2001. If she were in China, Russia or Venezuela, we’d know her. Sixty years old, with cancer, she’s in a Texas prison for women with psychiatric disorders (although she suffers no such disorder), prohibited from visitors (except a few family members), phone calls, letters, and news.

Her crime is that she opposed, and still opposes, her government’s foreign policy. Employed by the Defense Intelligence Agency, she knew facts, now declassified, about US aggression toward Cuba. She had the courage to believe them. She gave them to the Cuban government. She gained nothing. She hurt no one, stole nothing and committed no violence – except to lies.

She believed in justice, the “rational, sensitive dignity” kind. She thought Cuba should not be forced, through assassination, biological warfare, intimidation and destabilization, to submit to US interests.

In Havana recently, a taxi driver told me, “I have one question: Why are they so afraid of a small, poor country? What do they think will happen if they just let us develop?”

A lot will happen. It has to do, again, with how understanding occurs. We think within social limits. We see and give importance only to the facts that matter, given our interests. But sometimes we encounter an example that makes us care in ways we did not previously. We may even be moved, emotionally. Then we consider evidence we would not/could not have considered otherwise. It was there all along.

A Cuban friend working in tourism said that since US citizens began arriving in Cuba in greater numbers, she has not met a single one who was not positively surprised. “It is not what I expected”, they say.

If only they would seek out the explanations. But this takes imagination, caring, and courage.

Eduardo Galeano tells the following story in *El Libro de los Abrazos*: A friend was taking his small boy to see the sea for the first time. As they approached, the sea was just an intense smell. When finally it was in front of them, in its immensity, the boy was quiet, speechless before unexpected beauty. Eventually, able to speak,

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he said simply, “Papá, help me to see”.

We are lied to about democracy. This is well-known. But we are also lied to about lies. The truth is that we don’t see facts just by looking. We don’t even see what is in front of us just by looking. We need help to see what is not expected.

Galeano says art helps us to see. It can help us to see what we don’t see. It raises questions. People can do that for us too. Ana Belén Montes is one. She has believed, and still believes, truths that are available. She has possessed, and evidently still possesses, the moral imagination to know such truths matter.

After 16 years in isolation, she said, “I live totally isolated. I am subject to extreme psychological pressure ... but I will resist until the end.”

She went on: “I say to you what I’ve said to Cubans and to those sharing my solidarity with Cuba, that what matters is that the Cuban revolution exists ... that there will always be the Cuban revolution. Cubans must care for their revolution. I tried to do that”.

Cuba is an example. But to see what it is an example of – dignity, humanity – we may need help. Ana Belén Montes should be known, and released, for the sake of justice. But she should also be known in a time of lies, even about lies, for the sake of truth.

As Galeano suggests, we need help even to see beauty, if unimagined. So much more so for justice, unimagined and urgent.

Notes.

[i] Saramago, José, (2002, March 9), “From justice to democracy by way of the bells (Speech at the World Social Forum. Puerto Alegre, Brazil).

[ii] E.g. <http://www.prolibertad.org/ana-belen-montes>

Susan Babbitt is author of *Humanism and Embodiment* (Bloomsbury 2014).

OTORGAN A OSCAR LOPEZ RIVERA ORDEN DE LA SOLIDARIDAD



Oscar López Rivera, luchador independentista de Puerto Rico, rinde tributo al Héroe Nacional de Cuba José Martí, en el Memorial dedicado al Apóstol en La Habana. Foto: Abel Padrón Padilla. / ACN

Mercedes López Acea, miembro del Buró Político del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba y Vicepresidenta del Consejo de Estado, impuso en la mañana de este martes la Orden de la Solidaridad al luchador independentista Oscar López Rivera, en acto efectuado en el Memorial José Martí de la Plaza de la Revolución.

Durante la ceremonia, López Rivera reiteró su agradecimiento a Fidel, Raúl y al pueblo cubano, ejemplos de solidaridad “en los momentos en los que más lo necesitamos”.

“Una de las cosas que más admiro de este pueblo es el desarrollo alcanzado por sus recursos humanos. Este espíritu solidario es hijo de un proceso que comenzó en Cuba desde el inicio de las luchas por la independencia”, agregó.

El luchador boricua resaltó su confianza en la continuidad del ejemplo de Cuba y advirtió que hoy se vive en un mundo donde existen gobiernos capaces de promover guerras para saquear a los más vulnerables.

“El gobierno de Estados Unidos ha tenido una práctica de odio y miedo y eso destruye sociedades. Desde que son trece colonias se apreciaba la ambición de convertirse en un imperio”, acotó.

Por su parte, Fernando González Lloret, presidente del Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (ICAP) y compañero de López Rivera durante varios de sus meses en prisión, reconoció las cualidades del patriota puertorriqueño y resaltó su entereza, el valor y la solidaridad implícita en la resistencia demostrada durante los años que permaneció encarcelado.

“Nos convoca esta mañana el deseo y la decisión merecida de reconocer a nuestro

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NINA DROZ AND THE U.S. GOVERNMENT!

AUG 1, 2017 — by Mari Mari Narváez 7 July 2017
Originally published in *El Nuevo Día*, Translated into English by Eduardo Rivera.

Nina Droz is not simply some ordinary young woman who is fed up with this enormous system of exploitation. She seems to be made of an unperturbable substance; carrying her six feet tall frame, her bright red hair, her torn jeans, with the parsimony of those who feel that limit where there is not much left to lose.

Every time I see her photos, I begin to recognize in them our own expansive rage; in the half-torn, haunted look, the collective desire to go to the other side of the rage.

In the middle of the human rights crisis that we are living in Puerto Rico, we cannot escape the perversity that the U.S. the government continues to show. We have criticized the Junta de Control Fiscal (Fiscal Control Board imposed by the US government), the (Puerto Rican) Police, the (Puerto Rican) "governor", the (Puerto Rican) Legislature for violating the fundamental rights of the people. But the main culprit, the intellectual author, and first accomplice of these violations is the United States.

Nina Droz, the young woman arrested and imprisoned after the May 1 protest, was selected by the federal government as a "girl symbol", a warning of what the peasants on the colonial "hacienda" should not continue to do: protest.

They chose her to teach us a lesson. She is ridiculously accused of wanting to burn a huge cement building with a match. In two months since she was taken captive, they have not allowed her access to prescribed medicines for a condition of chronic anxiety and five herniated discs. They have put her in isolation, without a mattress, on the floor and despite having a high fever.

One of the reasons for the right to freedom of expression is the preservation of social peace. That is why this right is fundamental. It exists and is (supposedly) widely protected so that people can express their displeasure, their fury, and make demands on the government when it is not responding to the people – who is the sovereign. Protecting that collective right with amplitude is a way of preserving peace. Otherwise, people would resort to other, much more threatening, means to make their claims.



Nina Droz Franco after her arrest.

Criminalizing this young woman who protests and displays the wrath of thousands of us; Taking her as a hostage in order to prevent the rest of society from doing the same. This is state violence. This is an abuse of power and this is tyranny. It is the US government that invites disobedience.

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querido amigo Oscar López Rivera (...) Su capacidad para resistir, su valor personal, su sentido de dignidad y de solidaridad con los más necesitados lo convirtieron en un símbolo de sublevación contra el coloniaje", concluyó.

Minutos antes, López Rivera rindió tributo al Héroe Nacional José Martí con la colocación de una ofrenda floral al pie del monumento al Apóstol en el Memorial ubicado en la histórica Plaza de la Revolución.

Asistieron también a la actividad José Ramón Balaguer, miembro del Secretariado del Comité Central del PCC y jefe de su Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales, así como Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Héroe de la República de Cuba.

Invitado por el Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (ICAP), López Rivera cumple una amplia agenda que incluye recorridos por lugares de interés como el casco histórico de la Habana Vieja. Igualmente, el independentista boricua sostendrá encuentros con organizaciones y grupos de solidaridad con Cuba y otros que abogan por la total soberanía de Puerto Rico.

Está previsto también que Oscar López visité la provincia de Santiago de Cuba, donde rendirá homenaje al líder histórico de la Revolución Cubana, Fidel Castro.

Este es uno de los primeros viajes internacionales del luchador independentista desde que el pasado 17 de mayo saliera definitivamente de prisión. Tres meses antes, el expresidente de Estados Unidos, Barack Obama, había firmado la comutación de la condena contra López Rivera y con esa decisión puso fin a casi 36 años de prisión por luchar por la liberación de Puerto Rico.



JOIN THE MOVEMENT TO FREE ANA BELEN MONTES!



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ProLibertad can only do the work it does through the support of all of our allies. Make your tax deductible donation out to IFCO/ProLibertad and then mail it to:

IFCO/ProLibertad
418 w145th St.
New York, N.Y. 10031

JOIN THE PROLIBERTAD FREEDOM CAMPAIGN!

You have the power to free Oscar Lopez Rivera. Join ProLibertad and help us:

- Organize a community workshop;
- Put together a letter writing night;
- Dedicate a mass to the prisoners.

Come to one of our meetings!
Contact us at 718-601-4751!



ProLibertad Freedom Campaign

For over 20 years, the ProLibertad Freedom Campaign has been working for the release of the Puerto Rican Political Prisoners. With the release of 11 of the Political Prisoners in September 1999, we re-dedicated our efforts to securing the freedom of the remaining Puerto Rican political prisoners. Through educational events, lobbying and public pressure work and activities it is our goal to secure the freedom of these patriots whose only "crime" has been the love of their home land, Puerto Rico. We support the release of All U.S. held Political Prisoners, oppose the U.S. colonial control of Puerto Rico, oppose U.S. imperialism throughout the world, and the U.S. military presence in Vieques. For more information **Contact us at:**
ProLibertad@Hotmail.com, at 718-601-4751, or our website www.ProLibertad.org