

## Nonpayment: Who's the real debtor?

Escrito por Héctor L. Pesquera Sevillano / Co-President of MINH  
Jueves, 24 de Diciembre de 2015 06:18

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A lot has been said about the debt of more than \$70 billion Puerto Rico owes to investors, but how much does Washington owe us for obligating us to use the United States Merchant Marine for a century, the most expensive and inefficient in the world? The most conservative figures show an annual additional cost of some \$500 million for using the Merchant Marine to transport our food.

And how much do they owe us for the systematic destruction of our agriculture to obligate us to buy and import 85% of what we consume?

How much do they owe us for using and contaminating the Toro Negro Forest and El Yunque with agent orange and other poisons? What is Washington's debt for the massive sterilization project to which thousands of Puerto Rican women were subjected without their consent during the decade of the 1940's?

How much are the lives worth of the dead Puerto Rican soldiers who were used as cannon

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fodder in the United States' imperialist wars across the entire planet?

How much do they owe us for the unauthorized use of the waters of the Río Blanco as a water supply for their military base at Roosevelt Roads for years? The commonwealth government, on learning of the theft, billed them millions of dollars and the U.S. Federal Court in Puerto Rico ruled that the Navy had "Immunity" and didn't have to pay the debt. They demonstrated the same behavior of nonpayment with a "water thief" that for years supplied the precious liquid to the U.S. Post Office on Roosevelt Avenue in Hato Rey.

What is the value of their intervention in our electoral, judicial and political process for their advantage during the past decades? Now they are talking about imposing a Financial Control Board that would be over the Governor and the Legislature, to determine acts, laws, taxes and governmental contracts. That is unprecedented.

How much does Washington owe us for the colonial exploitation we have been subjected to for more than a century? What debt do they owe for using our best agricultural lands to establish military bases all over the entire island, forcibly expropriating land from its rightful owners? They spent more than 60 years in Vieques tossing shrapnel and toxins right and left, contaminating the environment and adversely affecting the health and development of the whole community. In Culebra there are still undetonated bombs and military waste that hasn't been cleaned up.

They claim they have no money to carry out the cleanup and decontamination that Culebra and Vieques urgently need. Checkmate! If they can't pay us, there is no reason for us to pay them.

Next year must be the year of nonpayment to the bondholders and the year to decolonize Puerto Rico. Senator María de Lourdes Santiago, the Puerto Rican Independence Party's gubernatorial candidate, launched a proposal of Nonpayment of the debt. We opt for and support it. First we need to audit the debt to determine if there was fraud and "parallel" benefit in granting the loans, and if the money was used for the purpose for which it was loaned. Ruling out illegal debt, we have to go against those who benefitted from the hustle. And set off the remainder from what Washington owes us for a system of colonial dependency that has brought us to ruins while they have become even richer as a result.

For the United States Congress, we "belong to but are not part of the United States." Well, one of their belongings is bankrupt, and they don't want to allow it to have the same option to use the Bankruptcy Laws that are available to the rest of their jurisdictions, a prerogative of principles of the capitalist system. So until they square the figures, there is no room for promises of payment or anything of the sort.

Once we have clarified the numbers, and Washington has recognized what it owes us, we will be in a position to negotiate the form of payment of said colonial debt, if there is any. And it's not the vulture funds that we'll be working with. The Republic of Puerto Rico will have access to Mercosur and the International Monetary Fund to finance the payment, if any, to the U.S. investors. We will see at the end of the road that they are the ones who owe us, and they are the ones who aren't paying.

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