

When Digna asked me a couple of months ago to speak at this event, I told her that I knew very little directly about Juan Mari Bras and wasn't sure I was an appropriate speaker. But, in any case, I was honored to be asked to speak, and it didn't take much for Digna to get me to say yes.

I never met or talked with Juan Mari, but I heard stories from Arthur Kinoy about him, and there is no question but that Arthur had great respect for Juan. Barbara Webster, Arthur's wife, has confirmed that Arthur had these special feelings.

For those who don't know or know little about Arthur Kinoy, he was similar to Juan Mari in many ways. He became active in radical activist politics while a student in the 1930's. He became a lawyer and spent half a century using his legal skills in the service of the people's movements. He was very active with the Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee in the 1970s and the 1976 "Bicentennial Without Colonies" mobilization to Philadelphia. It was also around this time that he co-founded an organization, the Mass Party Organizing Committee, that worked for years to build unity on the Left as well as for a progressive alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties. Arthur died 10 years ago, in 2003.

Arthur felt close to Juan in part, I'm sure, because they were both people's lawyers, committed, more than anything else, to the struggle for justice, national self-determination and independence and a new, socialist society. It was also because they were creative in their use of the law to advance the movement, as I learned as far as Juan Mari while doing research for this presentation. I learned of his many-years-long struggle in the 90's and the first decade of this century when he renounced his US citizenship. This led eventually to his becoming the first person to receive a certificate of Puerto Rican citizenship from the Puerto Rico Department of State. In 2007 the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rico Secretary of Justice determined that Puerto Rican citizenship exists and was recognized in the Constitution of Puerto Rico.

I also learned in my research about the murder, possibly the political assassination, of one of his sons in 1976 while Mari Bras was campaigning, and the years of harassment by the FBI that he endured. He once stated to someone interviewing him that "what more can they do to me,

they've taken my son." There are few things more difficult in life than the death of one's child.

I remember fondly the years in the 70's and into the 80's when I was working actively with the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in various campaigns and coalitions. As a young person in his 20's who had an interest in scientific socialism but who wasn't attracted to the practice of it by almost all the groups that called themselves Marxist-Leninist in the USA, the people I met and the practice of the PSP were a revelation. Jose Alberto, Digna, Alfredo, Che, Andy, Vivian and everyone I'm forgetting, thanks for all you did to inspire and teach me.

I remember going to a meeting with Congressman Ron Dellums while I was the coordinator of the Washington, D.C. Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee. I think this is the first actual US Congressperson I ever met. I went with Alfredo Lopez, who I was just beginning to get to know, and I remember how effective Alfredo was in his presentation and how responsive Dellums was, saying something to the effect of, "How could I do anything other than to support the right of a colonized people to determine their own future free of colonial oppression?" This led, in 1976, to a resolution introduced by him to the US Congress in 1976 calling for "all power and authority exercised by the U.S. government be relinquished and transferred unconditionally and without reservation to the people of Puerto Rico in order to allow them to fully exercise their inalienable right to self determination and independence."

I remember July 4th, 1976 in Philadelphia, the multi-cultural demonstration of 50,000 people for A Bicentennial Without Colonies and many other progressive demands. The three main ones, in addition to a Bicentennial Without Colonies, were Freedom for All Oppressed Nations, For Full Democracy and Equality and For Jobs and a Decent Standard of Living.

The coalition built to organize this demonstration was a genuinely multi-racial coalition with representation from just about all of the nationalities that make up the USA. It was unique for its time and I am sure it played a role in preparing the ground for other important multi-racial efforts in this country, such as the Rainbow Coalition movement of the 1980's.

I also remember how the skies opened up and the rains came down in great force just as Juan Mari Bras began to speak on that day.

Life and the struggle for a new world can be like that, full of ups and downs, great triumphs and

great disappointments. In the end, when each of us passes on to whatever comes after this earthly existence, all we can leave behind for others is what we have done, how faithful we have been to the best within us and to the Spirit of All-Encompassing Love which rules the universe.

Let me close with a Juan Mari Bras quote. Though about the Puerto Rican struggle, the words are universal:

“Only through a great unified movement looking beyond political and ideological differences, can the prevalent fears of hunger and persecution be overcome for the eventual liberation of Puerto Rico, breaking through domination by the greatest imperialist power of our age”.

Arthur Kinoy believed in and worked for a great unified movement, like Juan Mari Bras, knowing the truth of the saying, “In unity there is strength.” In this time of an urgent climate crisis, deep economic injustice and inequality, and continuing US imperialist power, let us find the ways to honor Juan and Arthur in the best way possible by doing all we can to create such a unified movement as soon as possible.

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- Speech delivered during the Tribute to Juan Mari Brás, held in New York City, May 15, 2013.
 - Ted Glick is a writer, radical activist and people organizer. His columns and books are available at <http://www.tedglick.com>.