

Whither the PDP?

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If one were to draw a conclusion from the radio talk shows, columns in our daily press or the questions newspaper reporters ask our politicians, one would conclude the Popular Democratic Party's (PDP) defeat in the elections has sent the PDP in an ideological tailspin, drawing it toward catastrophic consequences. This isn't the case.

Yet, that is what we perceive from the media, which festers on the status issue. Life is infinitely larger than status, but a politicized political and media elite can't perceive the wide expanses of reality. One becomes politicized when one perceives reality solely from the point of view of politics. In Puerto Rico, politics mostly means status. Status dominates our political discourse and warps our perceptions of reality.

Take the issue of colonialism, which is at the heart of the status debate. Colonialism is a charge leveled in Puerto Rico against the PDP, which supports Commonwealth. Yet, if there weren't a warped perception of reality, colonialism would be a charge leveled against the alleged colonial power: the U.S. No statehood leader charges the U.S. with this behavior. Only the PDP is indicted! Once in a while, the *independentistas* focus on the U.S. but, to them, the real colonialist is the PDP. Unreal, but this is the result of politicalization in Puerto Rico.

Or look at this issue another way. How many Puerto Ricans feel the alleged burden or oppression of colonialism from the U.S. in their daily lives? How many really feel the alleged plenary powers of the U.S. Congress are weighing down upon their aspiration to a better education, to live where they choose within their means, to get a better job or speak their mind and associate with whomever they choose to pursue lawful ends? Colonialism is an ideological issue far removed from the daily lives of our people.

If reality were perceived as it is, political discourse on our relationship with the U.S. wouldn't be focused on such matters as colonialism. It would focus on the virtues and defects of our compact with the U.S. as they relate to our problems and our aspirations. It would propose amendments to the compact to correct its defects or it would propose status changes to statehood or independence, stating the reasons why we would be better off through such changes. But the ideological dialectic dominates our political discourse, distancing us from reality.

The real tailspin affecting Puerto Rico's capacity to extricate itself from the dire circumstances in which we find ourselves is the superficial ideological discourse coming from our media and politicians, which constrains creative solutions to our problems based on the ample possibilities stemming from reality. The superficiality of this discourse is appalling. It manages buzzwords such as sovereignty as hollow but

emotional rhetoric without giving them meaning or precise content. The tragedy is that it doesn't move forward toward meaning and content. It is stuck in formalism and emotion.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled the Commonwealth government of Puerto Rico is sovereign as are the states of the Union over matters not ruled by the federal government under the U.S. Constitution. The Commonwealth Constitution ordained in its compact with Congress that the source of power of our government is the people of Puerto Rico and the power of our government must be exercised according to the sovereign will of our people.

This in concrete terms is sovereignty within the Constitutional system of the U.S. The goal of the PDP in pursuing the perfection of Commonwealth has been to eliminate the democratic deficit in the compact and to add such powers to our sovereign government as are necessary for Puerto Rico's better governance. It hasn't been to achieve the sovereignty of an independent nation, which is the sovereignty pertaining to the federal government.

The rhetorical handling of sovereignty without specificity as to what type of sovereignty we are talking about is a dishonest play on emotions, a political maneuver the New Progressive Party seizes on, questioning the direction toward which the PDP intends to take the island. This debate is totally sterile. The political elite and the media are discussing the same questions they did 50 years ago. There is a desperate need to move forward.

Whither the PDP? The silent majority, overwhelming within the PDP, stands for permanent union with the U.S. through the mutually binding compact entered in 1952, which establishes a government of the people and by the people in Puerto Rico, a noncolonial relationship, sovereign over matters not ruled by the U.S. Constitution. Our government doesn't exercise delegated powers from Congress but rather powers invested in it by the people of Puerto Rico. The PDP electorate hasn't moved from this position. Its future agenda is to perfect Commonwealth within the U.S. constitutional system. It is an autonomist party, not an independence party.

One would think this isn't the case if one listens to the talk shows or reads the dailies. Sadly, on this island, political discourse moves in a parallel line above reality and never touches it until the polls close every four years and the will of the people is expressed once again. After that, the merry-go-round of status begins once again.

To move Puerto Rico forward, we must break the status gridlock. Fresh thinking is necessary to do this. It would be shameful if the same story of the past 16 years were repeated once again before Congress—statehooders pursuing a bill that will exclude Commonwealth as a final solution; Commonwealth supporters opposing it and the leadership in Congress throwing up their arms crying, "why don't these people get their act together?"

Let's not waste these four years with that sterile battle again. Let's engage Congress in constructive ways that will take us to self-determination, which we can all support as positive steps to get Puerto Rico moving again. If status can't be resolved now, then we need a road map for progress while steps are taken to resolve it.

