

COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
LA FORTALEZA, SAN JUAN



MESSAGE OF THE GOVERNOR OF PUERTO RICO
RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON
BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF INTERNATIONAL LADIES GARMENT WORKERS UNION
MARCH 5, 1975

President Louis Stolberg, Members of the Executive Board of the
International Ladies Garment Workers Union, my dear friend Clifford
Depin, ladies and gentlemen:

It is an honor to accept your invitation and your gracious expressions
on this memorable occasion. As a Puerto Rican I am also honored that
you have chosen our Island for the site of such an important meeting.
I welcome you in the name of the people of Puerto Rico and offer you
our traditional hospitality.

I also appreciate your gesture because of what this union has come
to mean to us. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union was
a pioneer in the field of unionism in the garment industry in the United
States as well as in Puerto Rico. In the history of the Economic

Development of Puerto Rico there is a whole chapter devoted to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and particularly to that leader whom we recall with admiration, Mr. David Dubinsky. For many years we have shared varied experiences. We have tried to understand your problems and aspirations as a labor union and you have tried to understand the problems and aspirations of our workers and of the people of Puerto Rico as a whole.

Along with that mutual understanding, together, we have achieved significant benefits and continuous progress for the thousands of workers that you represent, which have reflected on all the workers in the garment industry. We have shared decades of progress. We have seen wages in the industry raise from less than fifty cents to over two dollars an hour. We have seen the change in the faces of the workers and their families; in their health - through the union's efforts to insure proper medical care, and in their general well-being through various projects sponsored by the union.

We have shared the changes in the Puerto Rican life.

This Administration has been actively working on the improvement of manufacturing as one of the principal generators of the economy.

In this struggle we have encountered difficulties. We are no longer a low-wage area. We must depend on increasing productivity in order to attract industry and provide additional employment for our rapidly growing labor force. We must continue our struggle against rising unemployment without sacrificing our objective of achieving as high a wage level as is compatible with the preservation of industry and a reasonable rate of growth. This becomes increasingly difficult in view of the competition of very low-wage areas, particularly in labor-intensive operations such as the garment industry.

Unfortunately, since International Ladies Garment Workers Union established their operations in Puerto Rico --near a quarter of a century-- we have not see an economic recession of the magnitude that we now have throughout the Nation, including Puerto Rico. In January, the unemployment

rate for United States was 8.1%. In Puerto Rico it rose to 17.1%.

Factories have closed and workers are unemployed, creating a critical situation in many communities in, Puerto Rico. You and I know that the moment has arrived for the federal authorities to take quick and effective action to end depression and control inflation. Meanwhile, unions, employers, workers, and state and local governments must do their share to combat the terrible effects of the economic crisis on our people. My administration is working diligently to try to reduce its impact on the workers through several government programs. Among these: an active and forceful consumer price control program through our the Department of Consumer Affairs. We also approved a government subsidy to low energy consumers that stay within the 425 kilovats a month limits. We have also stepped-up wage revisions under our Commonwealth Minimum Wage Law.

We expect the rest of the sectors who have a stake in the well-being of the people and the economy of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to do

their share in every possible way in these difficult times we all are facing. We are counting on the International Ladies Garment Workers Union which is genuinely involved in the Island's labor situation, and has proven to be a sincere friend of our's to help us in this struggle.

We are optimistic and we know that we will soon be back again on the road to prosperity. We will march together on this road with you and all the workers of Puerto Rico. Thank you.