



REMARKS BY THE GOVERNOR
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
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We live in a time which must be a journalist's paradise. And yet, paradoxically, it must also be something of a nightmare to responsible journalists. Seldom has there been so much news, so much "hard news", so much sensational news. And rarely has it been more difficult to dig below the headlines, to separate the sensational from the important, and to put the events of our times in intelligent perspective. I greatly admire journalists who do this well, and I realize how difficult it must be.

This dilemma is very relevant to Puerto Rico at this moment, I might note. For an average American reader, or television viewer, the most vivid news impression about Puerto Rico during the last year must have been that of fatal bombings in New York by a terrorist group calling itself the FALN, which claims it wants to advance the cause of Puerto Rican independence.

It would be understandable if many Americans were to have the impression from this dramatic news that political status is an overriding and turbulent issue in the Commonwealth, and that the pro-independence factions are making headway in the island.

Yet these impressions are totally false. This is almost a textbook case where the apparent news is

completely at variance with the real news.

First of all, we in Puerto Rico have never heard of this FALN until recently, and the New York police says it may consist of as few as two people and probably not more than twelve. There is no real evidence that they are even Puerto Ricans and, curiously enough, the leadership of the radical pro-independence movement in New York consists overwhelmingly of non-Puerto Ricans. Whatever the FALN is, I can state categorically that it is utterly without support in Puerto Rico itself, where 99.9% of the people have reacted with horror and indignation at these senseless bombings.

Secondly, far from signalling any upsurge in independence sentiment in Puerto Rico, such bombings -- if indeed conducted by Puerto Ricans -- would be an admission of political bankruptcy of pro-independence forces. Even before the bombings, the combined groups favoring independence totalled less than 5% of Puerto Rican voters, while over 95% have consistently supported parties advocating permanent union with the United States.

Least of all are such bombings symptomatic of any rising anti-American sentiment in Puerto Rico. The only threat they pose to U.S.-Puerto Rican relations

would occur if Americans perceived the bombings as reflecting Puerto Ricans sentiments or methods -- which they categorically do not.

The world appears to be suffering from an epidemic of such terrorism, spreading from the Near East to Stockholm to Great Britain to Oakland, California. In the murky and probably psychotic mind of the bombers, the FALN seems very similar to the Weather Underground and the Symbionese Liberation Army, and it is about as representative of Puerto Rico as the Symbionese and the Weathermen are representative of the United States.

Another misconception about Puerto Rico which may linger in the aftermath of the pro-statehood Ferre administration, which was voted out of office in 1972 after a single term, is that the sector of Puerto Rican public opinion in favor of statehood is growing and also polarizing vis-a-vis the proindependence sector.

Again, this is a totally erroneous impression. The once militant pro-statehood movement which founded the winning party in 1968 has muffled its pro-statehood drums.

Faced by the 1972 electoral results, and continued evidence in public opinion polls about the overwhelming pro-Commonwealth sentiment among the Puerto Rican

people, only lip service in formal platforms is now given to statehood. Lacking militant support among the leadership of the Ferre party, statehood for Puerto Rico is on the road to oblivion. No one is willing to risk his political future by making it an issue.

Against this background of what is not representative of Puerto Rico, I would like to talk to you today about what is representative and important about the Commonwealth and its very unique relations with the United States. Though we are going through a very trying economic period at the moment, the basics about Puerto Rico's relations with the United States are not affected by the combined inflation and recession which has hit our island even harder than they have hit the United States as a whole.

Many of you know the fundamentals of Puerto Rico's ties with the United States, I am sure. In 1952 Puerto Rico entered into an unusual compact with the United States, of its own free will. It is called the Commonwealth in English and the Estado Libre Asociado in Spanish -- the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, and they take their obligations as citizens seriously, as amply witnessed by their distinguished service and numerous decorations for

bravery in the U.S. Armed Forces in three wars.

But Puerto Ricans are distinctive from other American citizens. They learn Spanish at their mothers' knee, though they also begin to study English in the second grade, and continue it as a required subject through their school careers. As a result, Puerto Rico has become the most bilingual community in English and Spanish in the Western Hemisphere.

The island also has a long history and a Hispanic culture; San Juan was founded more than 100 years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. Puerto Ricans cherish both their Puerto Rican heritage and culture and their U.S. citizenship, and over 95% of the people find no conflict in this.

There are other important differences between the United States and Puerto Rico, of which the most striking are demographic and economic. Puerto Rico is a small, largely mountainous island with 875 people per square mile -- among the highest population densities in the world. To translate this into equivalent U.S. terms, you would have to imagine the United States with a population of three billion, crammed mostly into the Eastern and Western seaboard.

In addition, Puerto Rico is totally lacking in

energy sources and all industrial raw materials, except some copper. If you can conceive of three billion people jammed into the United States --having to import all their oil, coal and natural gas for energy, as well as their industrial raw materials, and more than 50% of their food -- you will have a quite accurate picture of the economic intrinsics of Puerto Rico. Needless to say, this has made Puerto Rico's economic development a very uphill job. Indeed, even after World War II, most economists considered Puerto Rico's economic prospects as being about zero.

Nonetheless, despite these severe handicaps, Puerto Rico's per capita income has soared from \$121 yearly in 1940 to \$2,000 today, and its rapid rise out of acute poverty to relative affluence has been widely recognized as one of the most remarkable in the post-war period. I stress that its affluence is relative, however. Compared with the Latin American countries, Puerto Rico now has a high standard of living, but compared with the United States, we are still relatively poor.

And during the current recession, our unemployment rate has reached an alarming 17%. We are having a grim time at present, but we are confident that, as the

American economy as a whole recovers, so will that of Puerto Rico.

Yet Puerto Rico's past and future economic growth would have been and would be impossible were it not for the fact that, 22 years ago, it decided to ignore the rush of almost all former colonies toward nationalism and 19th century-type sovereignty. Instead, Puerto Ricans took "the path less traveled by" and became one of the first peoples to enter the post-national world of interdependence.

This still little-understood evolution of the Commonwealth as a distinctive, autonomous political body, but an interdependent one, is the real heart of the Puerto Rican experience in today's world. The creation of the Commonwealth was in itself an act of very far-sighted statesmanship both on the part of U.S. and Puerto Rican leaders, which former Chief Justice Earl Warren described as "perhaps the most notable of American political experiments of our lifetime".

Today the Commonwealth is no longer an experiment, but a vigorous reality which has proved itself to be "one of the most original and fruitful social-political formulas of our epoch", in the words of a distinguished international scholar. And in its main outlines, the

Commonwealth has worked extraordinarily well, both for Puerto Rico and for the United States.

Speaking only of the economic side, Puerto Rico's rapid growth would have been impossible except in the political framework of the Commonwealth relationship. But this growth has also been of great benefit to the rest of the United States, as well. Though it may sound incredible, Puerto Rico's yearly purchases of over \$2.6 billion from the United States are actually greater than the combined purchases from the U.S. of the Soviet Union, China and India -- though these huge nations have 1,650 million people to Puerto Rico's three million.

So U.S.-Puerto Rican relations are by no means a one-way street, even in the economic area. And on the diplomatic side, the United States has benefitted in another way. Not only has the Commonwealth gained a world-wide reputation as a democratic model of economic development, but over 20,000 officials, technicians and teachers have traveled to Puerto Rico from literally 150 nations to study various aspects of its social and economic advances. All this has reflected great credit on both the United States and Puerto Rico.

Now, after more than two decades of pragmatic experience with its Commonwealth ties to the United

States, Puerto Rico is recommending some changes. It is not proposing changes in the fundamentals of the ties, but it is urging revision where experience has shown that the existing structure is not sufficiently responsive to present realities. These recommendations are being made through the U.S.-Puerto Rican Ad Hoc Advisory Group, which was jointly appointed by the President and myself, and which consists of seven Puerto Rican members headed by former Governor Luis Muñoz Marín and seven Americans headed by former Senator Marlow Cook. The group is expected to meet again soon to continue its deliberations on specific proposals promulgated by the Puerto Rican members.

The main thrust of the Puerto Rican proposals is directed toward vesting in the Commonwealth government the maximum amount of self-government which is consonant with our basic ties of common citizenship, common defense, common foreign policy, common market and common currency.

It is very difficult for all Federal laws and regulations which affect Puerto Rico to be framed with a view to Puerto Rico's need and realities. For example, Puerto Rico is a small island, over 1,000 miles from the U.S. mainland, surrounded by ocean and swept by the

trade-winds. As a result, its environmental and ecological conditions are vastly different from those of the continental United States. We are therefore proposing that Puerto Rico determine what are the most appropriate laws and regulations affecting the environment of the island.

We are also proposing that Puerto Rico have far greater say in application of minimum wage laws to the island since our economic intrinsics are so different from those in the United States. Not only is our population density staggering, but even with our long and hard-earned economic development, the present official unemployment rate of 17% is far too high, and unofficially the rate is believed to be as high as 30-35%. In such circumstances, insensitive or inflexible application of federal minimum wage laws can actually cause higher unemployment, defeating the very objective of labor legislation.

Our heavy population density is also the prime reason for another proposal: that Puerto Rico have considerable voice in determining the number of foreign immigrants allowed to settle in the island. If the United States had 875 people per square mile, instead of its present 60, its own immigration policy would have to

be far more rigorous than at present. But Puerto Rico does have this problem now, and we feel a growing need to be empowered to limit the number and types of immigrants coming to our crowded island.

In addition to the intrinsic and explicit reasons for seeking such revisions is the fact that Puerto Rico now has 22 years of experience in self-government behind it. You might compare Puerto Rico to a former political adolescent who has now grown to young manhood, and who is not only able to assume greater responsibility in managing his own affairs, but also wants and needs to do so. He is no less a member of the family for seeking more self-government, but he is a more mature member of the family.

Looked at in the largest perspective, these proposals might be viewed as "fine tuning" of a motor which has worked very well in most respects. The heart of the Puerto Rican bond with the United States goes well beyond economic interdependence, important though it is. Rather it is the accumulated and deep mutual confidence and respect which have grown over the years. Underlying the legalities is the fundamental fact- that Puerto Ricans have self-determination, and that the United States has repeatedly recognized this. It has

also vouched for this before the United Nations,--where-
there has-not been a lack of members who -- either out-
of Ignorance or out of mischief -- have often charged
that Puerto Rico is still a "disguised" colony.

We Puerto Ricans know this is not true, but it is
important that there not be even- the appearance of
colonialism in our relationship. This is one reason why
periodic "fine tuning" of this sort, at the request of
Puerto Rico, is not at all a routine matter. On the
contrary, the manner in which the United States, through
Congress, reacts to Puerto Rico's proposals, is probably
more important than the nuts and bolts of the proposals
themselves. This is true not only in Puerto Rico but
also in the eyes of the world.

The important thing is that this unique, and
uniquely successful formula of interdependent
association should maintain its vitality and momentum.
It is a formula which has proved to be 20 years ahead of
its time, and which is not remarkably relevant to our
epoch. In a world which is suddenly aware that
interdependence must become a global reality instead of
mere rhetoric, Puerto Rico and the United States have
created a model of close and fruitful interdependence
which is one of the most constructive achievements of

the last two decades.

At a time when there is so much depressing news on the world scene, this is the really important news out of Puerto Rico.

Thank you for inviting me and thank you for listening to me so courteously. I hope that you will all do us the pleasure of visiting us in Puerto Rico. When you do, I can promise that you will find a warm greeting, a beautiful island, and a limitless supply of good will awaiting you.

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