



REMARKS BY THE GOVERNOR
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
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I am delighted to have the opportunity to address you, the members and guests of the National Press Club, and I wish to thank President Alden for inviting me to be with you here today.

As the sun set upon the remnants of the Spanish Empire at the turn of the last century, Puerto Rico was the only colony established by Spain in the New World that did not proclaim its independence. Instead, as a result of the Spanish American War, the Puerto Ricans as a people found themselves within the sovereignty of the United States of America. The present century has witnessed our efforts towards finding a place for ourselves within the American political system. A place in keeping with our heritage and identity. A place suited to the economic constraints of the limited geography of our island.

For 78 years --more than one third of the bicentennial, which we celebrate this year-- Puerto Rico has been linked politically with the United States. We have been citizens for 59 years. And yet, some relevant questions can still be raised: Do we know each other well? Is public opinion in the United States aware of what we are, as people, as an island economy, as a cultural community rooted in the language of Cervantes?

A notable contemporary Puerto Rican historian, the

President of our University, Dr. Arturo Morales Carrión, answers these questions with revealing insight: If we take, says Morales Carrión, the excellent textbook put out by the late Richard Hofstadter, William Miller, and Daniel Aaron, The United States: The History of a Republic (1967), Puerto Rico suddenly appears in connection with the Spanish-American War. It is ceded, of course, by Spain in the Treaty of Paris. It is mentioned in connection with the Insular Cases brought before the U.S. Supreme Court, and then it vanishes into thin historical air.

An outstanding diplomatic textbook, Thomas A. Bailey's A Diplomatic History of the American People, (1964), tells us that President McKinley decided to take Puerto Rico in order to banish Spanish power completely from the Americas. Linking Puerto Rico with the Philippines, the author recalls how Senator Pettigrew of South Dakota, declared, with no little truth, that "bananas and self government could not grow on the same section of land." Having disposed of Puerto Rico as banana split, he leaves it to disappear in its thick tropical foliage.

Absent from U.S. history books, concludes Morales Carrión, which are more concerned with Cuba, Hawaii, or

the Philippines, Puerto Rico remains an unknown world, a baffling land, coveted by the tourist agencies, defined by traveling journalists, so near, in many ways, and yet so far apart. Puerto Rico is debated at the U.N. as another Vietnam or Angola, or Mozambique, by people who do not have the faintest idea of what or where the island is. In Paris, it was even stated recently that life in Puerto Rico today is worse than in France under the Nazi occupation. For many of us who live and toil in Puerto Rico, the stories now being told about the island and its people seem often to be like Alice's adventures after she went through the looking-glass. They could have been written by Tweedledee if not Tweedledum.

The facts are that throughout the years a very close-knit relationship had developed between Puerto Rico and the United States. That we have maintained our Puerto Rican identity with a deep loyalty to our American citizenship. That democracy is as much a way of life in Puerto Rico as it is in the United States. That working through out political system the Puerto Rican people accomplished a dramatic transformation of the island. That current hardships have shown that, though improvable, the system is basically sound. That we have worked out the structural framework for a dynamic relationship with

the United States. That is basic framework has the overwhelming support of the Puerto Rican people, and that the processes for solving the problem arising in our ongoing relationship are being worked out.

At present, we are fighting a stiff battle against the effects of the last recession. It has left our unemployment hovering around 20% and our construction industry in shambles. But we are now certain that the worst is behind us. We have an industrial development unmatched in the Caribbean, and this sector is recuperating rapidly. We just had the best tourist season ever, and our agriculture, whose earlier decline we turned around during our first fiscal year of my administration, held its growth right through the recession and continues to climb.

We are confident and optimistic. We are resolving our financial needs. Our social and economic infrastructures are sound. The proportion of our school age population going to school at all levels is as high as that of most developed countries in the world. We have taken stern measurements to maintain our fiscal integrity. We are intent on raising the overall productivity of the island. There is a quiet resolve and dedication amongst Puerto Ricans to forge ahead. There is no doubt in my

mind that we will.

We are going about our own affairs, affirming ourselves against the challenges of these complex times, respectful of others and expecting to be respected.

In particular, we desire that our right of self-determination be respected. We are frankly tired of people who can't locate Puerto Rico on the map, yet who, siding with the Cubans in the U.N., try to tell us what we should do or what we should be.

The Puerto Rican people have repeatedly made clear that their concept of self-determination is as an autonomous Commonwealth, rather than as an independent nation. Since the Commonwealth was founded in 1952, it has been recognized as a highly innovative and creative concept which has introduced a new form of federal relationship. In a political status referendum in 1967, the Puerto Rican people voted an overwhelming mandate for the improvement of their existing Commonwealth status, and it was under the mandate that a joint and bipartisan U.S. - Puerto Rico Ad Hoc Advisory Group was organized in 1973 to recommend specific forms for such improvement. The recommendations of this group are now before the Congress and the form of a revised compact of union between Puerto Rico and the United States. This compact is therefore a

new and very important stage of a continuous process to adjust the details of U.S.-Puerto Rican relationship to changing circumstances and to our mutual benefit.

One of the main purposes of the Compact of Permanent Union is precisely to provide Puerto Rican with sufficient flexibility to have the best possible opportunity to create jobs and to reinvigorate its economy. Even with such flexibility we have a tough job ahead of us; without it, the job is far more difficult.

The task of creating new jobs in Puerto Rico is one in which U. S. interest as well as its good will should be deeply engaged. The matter is sufficiently serious to require fresh thinking in both the Legislative and Executive branches in the United States regarding federal policies and programs as they affect Puerto Rico.

The extension of the Food Stamp Program in Puerto Rico has been enormous help to us in going through recession.

But I would like to stress that the basic policy of the Commonwealth Government is to create more jobs. We want to reinvigorate our economic development, rather than be dependant on welfare programs. Everything my government can do to help create jobs is already in high gear and, as I said, our economy is already recovering -

albeit at a slower pace than the mainland economy. What we need most from the Federal Government are policies that will stimulate the permanent economic development in Puerto Rico. Such policies, for instance, as contained in the new section 936 of the Tax Reform Bill, which would allow tax-free mainland repatriation of profits made by U.S. companies on the island, and such policies as are embodied in the Compact now before the Congress. Indeed, one basic premise of the Compact is that Puerto Rico needs additional self-government and flexibility because Congress and the Federal government cannot reasonably be expected to weigh every place of legislation or every regulation in light of Puerto Rico's special requirements, and that the Commonwealth therefore must be allowed a large role in determining how national legislation can best apply to the island.

The Compact is and should be seen as a part of continuing process by which Puerto Rico can regain its formerly impressive economic momentum, renew its equally impressive social advances, and insure its political vitality and stability.

The process itself is important. Self determination, in a formula as new and unusual as that of the Commonwealth relationship, is not and cannot be static.

It must be living, evolving things, adapting intelligently to new realities, in a manner which gives continued meaning and dignity to a relationship which has proved for over a quarter century to be remarkably fruitful and which has potential for even greater growth through interdependence, in an era in which interdependence is clearly the key to the future.

Despite Puerto Rico's present, very real problems, both Americans and Puerto Ricans can be proud of the accomplishments which have already taken place under Commonwealth. Per capita income in Puerto Rico has risen from \$121 in 1940 to over \$2,000. Life expectancy has soared from 46 years to 72 years. Illiteracy has almost been wiped out. Educational and living standards have taken a quantum jump in the last quarter-century. A whole new middle class has been created and, by the standards of most of the world, Puerto Rico would be considered a relatively affluent middle-class society, with what this implies for social and political stability.

Most significant of all, the roots of democracy go very deep in Puerto Rico, as reflected by the fact that 85% of eligible voters actually go to the polls to vote.

It is no exaggeration to say that Puerto Rico has emerged as key citadel of freedom, democracy and peaceful

development in the Caribbean. It is obviously important that it remain so. All this has happened in an island 100 miles long and 35 miles wide,, whose population of 3 million adds up to 900 persons per square mile contrasted with 60 per square mile in the U.S.

In these troubled times, only rarely have Americans had to be seriously occupied with the Caribbean.

But now the situation is different. It is different partly because recent events have made the Caribbean area as a whole very unstable. This region, so strategically important to the United States, finds itself increasingly in economic trouble and political ferment. This ferment and instability appear to coincide, moreover, with a new, militant phase of Cuban revolutionary activity. Already, the Cubans have shown by their willingness to serve as a sort of "foreign legion" for the Soviet Union that they could pose a new threat to tranquility and security in the Western Hemisphere. I do not believe it is exaggerated to suggest that Cuba hopes to convert much of the Caribbean area into a totalitarian, Communist bloc hostile to the United States.

Puerto Rico, on the other hand, has shown a wholly opposite approach to the Caribbean. Puerto Rico has played an active role for years in cooperating with and assisting

other Caribbean nations in their economic and regional development, both through technical assistance and by generating Caribbean-wide development institutions.

Some 31,000 official foreign visitors from over 100 countries have visited Puerto Rico in the last 16 years to study various phases of our island's development -- many of them officials of high rank. Most came from the Caribbean and other parts of Latin America, but there were also many thousands from Asia and Africa.

In the Caribbean itself, some of the principal development institutions -- such as, the Caribbean Development Bank and the Caribbean Investment Corporation -- were conceived by Puerto Rico.

We are presently revitalizing and refocusing our technical assistance program, with the main accent on making available to other Caribbean countries our most pertinent experiences in public housing, public health and cooperative development -- all areas in which Puerto Rico is widely known for its successful programs, many of them highly relevant for other developing countries.

It is worth pointing out the Caribbean is composed of many small states with special problems -- problems which Puerto Rico knows and understands. What the small states require is peaceful development and cooperation, not a

disruptive and misguided revolutionary violence.

In this broad contest, Puerto Rico's basic importance is that it is the key citadel of democracy and stability in the Caribbean. Indeed, just as Cuba has become the symbol of militant and expansionist Marxism; the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is the symbol of liberty, democracy, and peaceful development in the Caribbean. It is against this larger background that we must view the role of Puerto Rico, today.

I believe the Puerto Rican people are up to the broader challenge that confronts us and the United States. Indeed, the challenge that confronts democracy. The extent to which we can be helpful, however, depends in considerable measure on the understanding of our possibilities by the United States, and the framing of the policies to take full advantage of our potential. I do not believe there is widespread understanding of these possibilities throughout the policy making bodies, although there are some notable exceptions. I am certain that the contribution which the members of the press can make in bringing Puerto Rico's larger potential into focus can be of invaluable service to the United States to Puerto Rico and to the common values in which we hold very dearly.

What we Puerto Ricans have been able to accomplish in

the past would have been impossible without the understanding and collaboration of the United States. Today, once more, we need that understanding and collaboration.

This is why I believe that it is important that the Compact now before Congress be acted on "with all deliberate speed". Puerto Rico must be able to continue its role as the democratic citadel in the Caribbean.

A great deal is at stake. I am confident that with our joint efforts the task can be done -- with all that this signifies for democracy and peaceful development in the Caribbean as a whole.