



By LUIS MUÑOZ MARIN

Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

Speech delivered on April 7, 1956, before the Annual Convention of the Associated Harvard Clubs held at Coral Gables, Florida

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PRESS COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO 1956

I am thankful to the Associated Harvard Clubs for this invitation to express my views on the future of inter-American relations and Puerto Rico's contribution to it. It is fitting that we should meet here in Florida. No federated state in the Union so much as Florida realizes the need for understanding between the United States and Latin America. No section of the United States can realize better than Florida what we are trying to do in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Associated State of Puerto Rico, as we call it in Spanish, to further that understanding. We are sharply aware of the stakes involved for the Americas. The United States realize that ever increasing need of bringing together the two basic streams of Western civilization which have given the new world such a commanding place in the struggle for freedom and human betterment. Latin Americans also realize it. But neither are quite sure that the other does. It is a most worthy task to correct this misapprehension.

Two variations of a way of life, two manners of a common cultural heritage come into contact in Puerto Rico and have the opportunity of influencing each other for better or for worse. It is the job of all of us to make it be for better, to see that this interaction of cultural forces, while minimizing clashes and frictions, do constantly enrich the social and economic well-being, the standard of values, the mores and aspirations of the peoples of this Hemisphere.

I should like to speak, in the course of this talk, of how we are trying to contribute to that end in Puerto Rico. First, however, it may be appropriate to give you, in a nutshell, the very recent story of our island Commonwealth. Since July 25, 1952, Puerto Rico is a self-governing Commonwealth, associated with the American Union through a voluntary compact. It represents a novel, flexible, imaginative relationship within the American constitutional tradition. As Chief Justice Earl Warren has recently said, on the occasion of the inauguration of the new Commonwealth Supreme Court Building: "In the sense that our American system is not static, in the sense that it is not an end but the means to an end- in the sense that it is an organism intended to grow and expand to meet varying conditions and items in a large country- in the sense that every governmental effort of ours is an experiment- so the new institutions of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico represent an experiment- the newest experiment and perhaps the most notable of American governmental experiments in our lifetimes." It is as well an experiment in non-nationalistic political freedom for a Latin American people. Puerto Rico, we know, is not a republic. Neither is it, under its new status, a U.S. possession or territory, nor is it in any way a colony. It is a new kind of state, both in the sense of the U.S. Federal System and in the general sense of people organized to govern themselves.

The compact, governing the relationship with the Federal Government, is founded on Public Law 600, which the people of Puerto Rico proposed to the U.S. Congress, providing for the organization of a government by the People of Puerto Rico under a constitution of their own adoption.



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Public Law 600 stated that the principle of government by consent was thereby fully recognized and that the Act was adopted in the nature of a compact. It could not go into effect unless approved by the people of Puerto Rico in a free referendum. The terms of the relationships between Puerto Rico and the United States were determined in the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act—a part of P.L.600- that is, a part of the compact. The Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act contains, among others, the provisions referring to the common citizenship, free trade, common coinage, a customs union, the federal judiciary, and the applicability of federal laws, with the exception of the internal revenue legislation.

P. L.600 was approved by the Congress almost unanimously. It was overwhelmingly ratified by the people of Puerto Rico at the polls, thus starting a complex and highly democratic constitutional process which finally led to the proclamation of the new Commonwealth status on July 25, 1952. On November 3, 1953, the Commonwealth was solemnly recognized as a self-governing political body in a historic resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

What is the meaning of this constitutional process, and of the economic and social effort that runs parallel with it, in terms of inter-American relations? What contribution to U.S. policies and U.S. prestige in this vital area of the world is being thus made? I think the answer to these questions can be better understood if placed within the context of the great problems which the United States is facing in its unavoidable and dramatic responsibility to champion the cause of free government and democratic values in this tense, war-weary world.

The Western world, with the American Union in the leadership, is facing the military challenge of communism. It is facing it by preparedness and vigilance and by a constant and sincere search for agreement on disarmament. But we know that the conflict with communist totalitarianism is not just an attempt to guarantee survival by military means, or even by disarmament. In a way, the armament race, gigantic and ominous as it is, gives one a feeling of anachronism, that it is a symbol of a world ailing because of its own physical strength and seeking for its cure a great wisdom that constantly eludes it.

Disarmament, if it comes, will not by itself stop the challenge to freedom. It would, however, make it a creative challenge. The struggle would then increasingly shape itself, I believe, as the ideological clash between the attempt to defeat economic poverty by political slavery and the purpose to enhance political and human freedom by economic productivity and social justice.

As it stands today, both struggles are going on, the military and the ideological. Within recent months we have witnessed an intensification of the ideological fight. We have all observed the moves of the Soviet Union into the field of technical assistance and economic aid to the underdeveloped areas, as well as of Russian support for old grievances against Western powers. In a world still bedeviled by



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undernourishment, evil housing conditions, scant protection against disease, little economic security, the Soviet thrust is more challenging to the Western world, that believes in fighting these evils through freedom, than a stockpile of hydrogen bombs.

The Soviet Prime Minister has announced Russia's intention of offering technical assistance to Latin America and to find better trade channels for its commerce. One of the top men of the Soviet is about to initiate a tour through Latin America offering manna. No doubt a vigorous offensive shall follow by the communists and their friends in Latin America to picture the Soviet pattern of life as most enticing to the underdeveloped economies in the Western Hemisphere and to unfold before their eyes a vision of a swift Industrial Revolution that may bring, in a generation, the abolition of poverty. They will speak of freedom as well as of economic salvation.

They will probably not be believed as to freedom; but they need not be, because many of the peoples are living under governments that are not democratic. The peoples are unfree and miserably poor. Even if only half of the Russian picture is accepted, the vision would be one of the unfamiliar surcease of extreme poverty even if under the familiar absence of democratic freedom. All such governments in Latin America claim to be anti-communist, and there is no reason to believe that they are not. There is, however, no doubt that in practice, in relation to the lives of their own peoples, they are also anti-democratic. The dealings of the U.S. with such regimes present a most delicate problem. There is no question that the U.S. must assure the peoples of the hemisphere of its genuine concern for their political freedom and human rights. And it is called upon to do this difficult feat while keeping its skirts clear of any suspicion of intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. It is a dilemma. But I believe there are ways for the U.S. to make a sufficiently clear distinction between its friends who are democrats and anti-communist and its friends who are only anti-communists.

In this respect, we should convince ourselves, and so become strongly convincing, that the answer to the communist challenge lies in the ability of the Western powers, and especially the United States, to show to the less fortunate countries of the world that a greater transformation can be achieved, at an even faster rate and on sounder economic foundations, without shattering, or ignoring, as the Russians and the Red Chinese have done, the fabric of political and individual liberties-and that the transformation need not be patterned after the capitalist mores that have been successful in the United States.

It is urgent that this answer be ready and available in dealing with Latin America.

Latin America, generally, is still an underdeveloped area; its per capita income is grievously too low; housing is a problem of the first magnitude; it is basically dependent on world trade, and particularly U. S. trade, for its cash and credits and for the purchase of the essential consumer goods and the capital goods its industrial growth requires. The U.S. uses in maintaining a high standard of



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living 53 per cent of the natural resources of the free world-with which indispensable contribution it maintains a civilization for 8 per cent of the free world's people. This creates a relationship that cannot be considered merely in commercial terms. It can not be a simple question of payment it money according to market. It would seem that the relationship could be better conceived as one of interdependent peoples working together towards a rough but substantial equality in the minima of civilized living.

Too great is the disparity between the wealth and industrial might of the United States and the economic insufficiency of Latin America. Even with a great fund of good will it imperils long-range understanding. To bridge that gap in the least possible time, with the most efficient techniques available, with the most effective partnership of governments and peoples is, in my opinion, the task of the inter-American system in this generation.

How to help the powerful emerging stream of Latin American aspirations to a future rooted in economic security and democratic freedom is an acid test of United States statesmanship, of American statesmanship in the widest sense of the word "American" and in the deepest sense of the word "statesmanship".

I think we all would have in mind not only a more productive but a finer social order, where there is more nourishment and more adequate shelter for the body, more of the modest good things of life, more opportunities for a general education stressing the values of our common heritage and the contributions of the individual cultures, as well as the search for scientific knowledge and its technological application-an order evolving into a democratic union of free peoples, where the human spirit more clearly perhaps than today is served by the economic process.

It is in this connection that the Puerto Rican experience can be clarifying. For it demonstrates a joint political creativeness of the U.S. and a people of Latin-American origin. In the economic, social and cultural field, it reveals the U.S. at its undogmatic best: the helping hand guided by the undoctinaire spirit, so forgetful of its bigness that it fully reveals its greatness. For if the Commonwealth idea is a tangible proof of the possibility of original political thinking in the Americas, a dramatic refutation of the communist claim that the United States position is narrow, colonialist and reactionary, the social and economic surge in Puerto Rico clearly demonstrates that a people of different historical background can find a way out of their former anguish and despair, in close association with the United States.

We have called this surge "Operation Bootstrap"-an effort to lead the people out of extreme poverty, if possible-("Operation Serenity")-not into extreme wealth; and to do this-"Operation Commonwealth"-in an association with the American Union so close as that of common citizenship. We have been healthily undoctinaire, with no fixed taboos, no immutable sacred cows, in the use of



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instruments to achieve a better standard of living, caring only that all instruments used conformed to the democratic process and could be tested periodically by approval of the public will at the polls. The Commonwealth Government pioneered in building and operating factories when there was need to do so, because private capital was hesitant to do it. It socialistically established and managed industries, and then capitalistically sold them to private enterprise and used the money in further stimulation of economic development by some more private enterprise. It has pioneered in attracting United States and foreign capital, in stimulating private initiative and investment, to promote prompt and effective industrialization. It has used United States techniques and ideas, adapting and rejecting them with a frank experimental temper. It has engaged in land reform without destroying the basic unit of production and without unfair expropriation. It has launched an educational program for young and adults which consumes nearly one third of our budget.

A few figures may tell of what the people of Puerto Rico have tried to accomplish in the last 15 years. In 1940, our net income was 230 million dollars. It is today nearly a billion, with a real increase of 107 per cent. Production has been doubled and or income per capita is now \$435, higher than all of the Latin American countries, with the exception of Venezuela. We had 300,000 students in 1940; now we have more than 600,000 and illiteracy has been reduced from 32% to 20% in the same period, while an active campaign is underway to wipe out this course altogether.

As former-Ambassador Chester Bowles has written, "More than most Americans, those who live in Puerto Rico share the hopes and heartaches of that two thirds of mankind who remain ill clad, ill housed and ill fed. Yet nowhere, except perhaps in the agricultural settlements of Israel or in some of the industrial and village projects of India, have there been pioneering efforts at economic development which match is promise the techniques recently evolved in Puerto Rico". And he latter adds, "Thus a decade ago Puerto Ricans learned a lesson which should now be a truism: that if a people are to be saved from whatever danger threatens them, whether it be the militant aggression of communism or the social scourge of poverty and disease, they will in the last analysis save themselves through their own indigenous power, pride and responsibility. If outsiders are to be helpful, their help must take the form of friendly and unobtrusive support."

Because the people of our Commonwealth are fired with a vision of what human energies can do to overcome man-created or nature-created misery, we have insisted in making Puerto Rico a training center for technical assistance, a laboratory for visitors from the New World and even Africa and Asia, so that they may see for themselves our unrelenting and peaceful war on colonialism, poverty, disease, ignorance, and hopelessness-carried out in terms of a deep sense of friendship, of brotherhood with the U.S. Even before Congress appropriated money for the Point Four program, our government established an office and offered its services and cooperation. We have received over 2,700 visitors and trainees-the vast majority from Latin America, who have acquired first hand



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knowledge of how the two great cultures of America can work together in terms of freedom, respect, and economic achievement. We have had of late in Puerto Rico eminent visitors like the wise President of Haiti, Paul Magloire, and that staunch defender of hemispheric solidarity through freedom, President José Figueres of Costa Rica. We have held numerous inter-American conferences, seminars, workshops, and meetings, always aiming at making our island a place where people of good faith from this Hemisphere can meet to discuss their common problems and aspirations in an atmosphere of freedom and mutual trust. We are a Latin American country composed of citizens of the United States. But that does not quite express it. It is not only that the citizenship is U.S. period, and the culture Latin American period. It is more than just the addition of those two concepts. It is an emerging new manner in the Americas, an example, perhaps a still dimly realized preview, of what a grand hemispheric union might look like to our children. In saying this, I am not referring to political institutions. Democratic peoples have to be constantly creative, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the people of it, are naturally by no means pretending to offer a pattern of political union. They believe that their experience may be a stimulant to imaginative search-political, cultural, social, economic. We are seeking serenity through an efficiency placed at the service of understanding.

This is a job in which we want to participate more and more. As we scan the social, economic, and political horizon, as we shape the course of the future generation in terms of a fuller and richer society, conducted with freedom and order, with more education than conspicuous consumption, with more imagination than acquisitiveness, we feel the deep spiritual urge to link our experience and hope to the wider search for hemispheric unity. The dream we dream is a realistic dream. Hard study, cool reasoning, unremitting labor and unfailing dedication, can make it possible.

Let us urgently devise the basic objectives in housing, in health, in education, in economic productivity, in communications, which may be attainable by different areas of the Hemisphere, according to their human and material resources. Let us solemnly declare that our essential goal-the goal of all Americans, North and South-is the abolition of extreme poverty, in the areas of misery remaining in regions of the U.S. and in the altiplano of Bolivia, the plains of Venezuela, the coffee lands of Puerto Rico and Central America, the sierras of Mexico-to wipe out extreme poverty in this Hemisphere within the lifetime of children already born. Let us encourage government and private initiative to share in a good partnership with a view to better distributive justice for all; and let's not be doctrinaire about it. Let us not be doctrinaire either as to socialism or capitalism, but only as to freedom and human dignity. Let us give friendly support to all groups thinking in terms of a greater, truly hemispheric America, not merely Latin, not merely Anglo-Saxon, and not merely temporary while a Russian danger lasts. An America to serve the world.