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Puerto Rico's Example

At a time when free men everywhere are concerned with the plight of underdeveloped countries, America can rightly point with pride to a quiet revolution which has changed the face of Puerto Rico. For the first time this week, the Commonwealth estimates that manufacturing has displaced agriculture as the chief source of the island's income. This milestone in Puerto Rico's "Operation Bootstrap" deserves the week-long celebration it is receiving. It has demonstrated in our own backyard what cynics have argued is improbable elsewhere: that an economically disadvantaged people can industrialize swiftly without resort to iron-fisted five-year plans or police state goads.

The statistics tell an impressive story. In less than a decade, the life expectancy of Puerto Ricans has increased from 46 to 61 years—and literacy has risen to nearly 80 per cent. The annual net income of the Commonwealth has climbed from \$230 million in 1940 to almost \$1 billion today. According to government estimates, productivity per worker has doubled in this same period—and the average family income has risen from \$600 in 1940 to \$2360 in 1955. Much of this rapid progress can be ascribed to the Puerto Rican government's energetic and effective campaign to attract new industries, to diversify the island's agriculture and to lure tourists.

Most important, these changes have taken place in the framework of a free society. Intelligent planning, self-help and free criticism have been the tools of change. It has been a wise policy for the State Department to send thousands of Point Four trainees and foreign visitors to study the island's achievement. As Puerto Rico's brilliant Governor, Luis Munoz Marin, pointed out recently:

The answer to the Communist challenge lies in the ability of the Western powers to show 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 the fabric of political and individual liberties.

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret Puerto Rico's example only in the narrow gauge of cold war strategy. Equally significant, the Commonwealth's advance is a turning point in the far older cold war against poverty and ignorance. While much still remains to be done to bring the island up to continental American standards of prosperity, Puerto Rico's present progress will mean a better life for more people soon. That is an enduring victory which surely transcends swiftly changing cold war strategies. It is worth cheering about.