

A Post Scriptum: The End of Consensus

After 1968, a new period ~~has~~ emerged in the island's history. The contours are still blurred and it would be presumptuous for the historian to delve into events with the certainty ~~which~~ a perspective of time usually affords. This is especially difficult when sharp and bitter divisions affect the body politic as is the case with contemporary Puerto Rico. And yet certain trends can be observed.

First and foremost, ^{we find} ~~is~~ the end of political consensus. During the Muñoz era, the voters consistently provided huge majorities to Muñoz and the PPD. But since 1968, the situation has changed. The PNP and the PPD have been locked in close, hard fought electoral battles. The PNP was in power from 1968 to 1972; then the PPD recouped and won by a comfortable majority: 609,670 votes to 524,039 for the PNP, only to lose again in 1976 by over 40,000 votes out of 1,464,600 voters. In 1980, it came back with undeniable strength, missing the governorship by a little over 3,000 votes and winning the Senate and 52 out of 77 municipalities. The PIP remained a very distant third with little over 5% of the vote, while the more radical Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño or PSP, with strong Cuban connections, failed to attract enough voters to remain as a registered party. ()

A report decision of the Tribunal Supremo Electoral...
The Wash...
() For the 1968-1970 elections, see Bayron Toro, op.cit. 245-274.

What Puerto Rico has now, besides the core of the party faithful, is a large floating vote, with tenuous partisan allegiances, a vote less sensitive to the status issue and more concerned with personalities, programs and performance. This vote is also very much affected by the chronic economic problems, and particularly the backlash of the world recession. Bread and butter issues, therefore, play a very important role in the Puerto Rican political picture, ~~far~~ overshadowing the pull of outright ideologies. *to a high degree the strength of status question*

There is also an end of consensus around the political personalities involved. Ferré wanted to follow on Muñoz' footsteps as the new charismatic figure that would attract the masses and lead them to statehood. But he failed to create a great coalition and was voted out of office in 1972, remaining as the PPN's elder statesman, the Mr. Republican of Puerto Rico, the friend of Nixon, Ford and Reagan.

He was succeeded in the governorship by Rafael Hernández Colón of the PPD, a young, capable lawyer, thoroughly devoted to Commonwealth status. Operating from the Senate as a power base and with Muñoz' blessing and strong personal support, Hernández Colón was able in 1972 to topple Ferré and restore the PPD to power. But the world recession hit his government badly and, like Ferré, he failed to coalesce the great majorities of yesteryear. He lost office in 1976, and trying a comeback, narrowly missed the governorship in 1980.

Hernández Colón was succeeded by Carlos Romero Barceló, the PNP's mayor from San Juan. An uncompromising foe of Commonwealth and the PPD, Romero, although elected on the old

platform that status was not an issue, promptly used every governmental resource to push for statehood and weed out most of the PPD's office holders. Confident on an overwhelming victory in 1980, Romero started laying the groundwork for a 1981 plebiscite, both in Puerto Rico and the United States. His highly politicized Administration failed, however, to obtain the solid, decisive majority he wanted. In November, 1980, he hardly managed to squeeze through, largely aided by the PNP strength in the metropolitan area and Romero's control of the party and the electoral machinery. In the metropolitan area, Romero lagged behind the mayor of San Juan, Hernán Padilla, rising star in the PNP, with close stateside connections with the U.S. Republican party.

In these electoral consultations, as stated, the pro-independence groups failed to make any significant showing. In part, this was due to their internal divisions and ideological . The PIP saw the emergence of a new leader, Rubén Berríos, a bright young lawyer, educated in the United States and Europe, with ideological ties with European socialism. In spite of his persuasive logic, he has been unable to make much headway, merely retaining the party as a registered organization. The PSP, under the leadership of Juan Mari Brás, a forceful defender of Marxism-Leninism, has not fared better. The Castro connection has appealed to some intellectual and student groups and Mari Brás himself has

evidenced a single-minded devotion to his cause reminiscent of Pedro Albizu Campos'. But the partisan spectrum so far has demonstrated that there is little for the extreme left. The battle is really for the control of a massive center of political opinion.

Puerto Rico is, therefore, divided as to political power with the two main parties locking horns at every turn. There is, therefore, no clear mandate for any particular status, and the main immediate concern is the future of the economy, whose growing dependence on federal funds is now seriously threatened by the sharp reductions in federal expenditures under the Reagan administration and by uncontrolled inflation.

The confusing political picture involves also the relations with the main U.S. parties. In a shrewd move, the PNP has managed to establish close contact with both the Republican and the Democratic parties. A segment of the PNP, led by Ferré and Padilla, affiliated with the GOP; while Governor Romero, the Resident Commissioner Baltazar Corrada del Río and the House Speaker, Angel Viera Martínez, are officially the Democratic leaders in Puerto Rico. The party has been thus assured of federal patronage both under Ford and Carter, and now under Reagan. The PDP, on the other hand, maintains its traditional ties with the liberal wing of the Democratic party, especially with Senator Edward M. Kennedy. It was this democratic wing that greatly favored commonwealth in its early years.

Under present conditions, it is highly improbable that any sort of effective concerted action could take place regarding the status issue. The 1967 plebiscite consensus got nowhere. Under Ferré, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group, contemplated in the law, simply explored the desirability of extending the presidential vote to Puerto Rico, an issue of great importance to ~~st~~holders but one on which commonwealth partisans were divided. The advisory group recommended that the presidential vote be accorded to the people of Puerto Rico, and that the recommendation would be submitted to a referendum. The Ferré gubernatorial debacle stopped the process.

Then, under Hernández Colón, a new Ad Hoc Advisory Group was appointed jointly by President Nixon and the Commonwealth governor, pursuant to the 1976 status plebiscite. The group was co-chaired by former Governor Muñoz Marín and Senator Morlow W. Cook. It was asked to submit recommendations on how to further "develop the maximum of self-government and self-determination within the framework of Commonwealth."

After a prolonged process of studies, inquiries, public hearings, reports and discussions covering a two year span; the Advisory Group concluded that a new compact of permanent union should be adopted to replace the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act, included in Public Law 600. ()

() For an analysis of this compact, see Compact of Permanent Union between Puerto Rico and the United States. Report of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Puerto Rico. (October, 1975).

The draft suggested went a considerable way in meeting some of the traditional objections to Commonwealth as approved in 1950-1952. It reaffirmed the permanent union through the principle of compact, founded upon common citizenship, common currency, common defense and common market, with the U.S. Supreme Court as the final arbiter. It recommended that Puerto Rico be renamed the Free Associated State. It further recommended that Puerto Rico have a representative in each House, but suggested that unless Congress expressly extend a law to Puerto Rico by specifically mentioning its applicability, Puerto Rico should not be covered. It also suggested that procedures be established under which the U.S. President and the governor could limit the number of aliens entering into Puerto Rico in order to help alleviate its overpopulation and employment problems: These and other provisions contemplated a broadening of Commonwealth authority and responsibility in areas which had traditionally been of federal concern.

But there was little interest in the Nixon - Ford

Administration in the Commission's work and report. The same held true for an indifferent Congress. Resident commissioner Jaime Benítez introduced in 1975 a bill for the new compact, but it never ^{got} seriously considered. The Ad Hoc Committee's draft proved to be another exercise in futility. ^{totally disregarded it. His} President Ford ^{and while skiing at Vail, Colorado,} interest was rather in promoting the statehood cause ^{and before leaving office,} he made a proposal to Congress, on January 1, 1977 ^{in favor of statehood, in spite of the fact that there had been} in that regard. The Carter Administration, ^{this principle,} while ostensibly siding with ~~self-determination~~, actually favored the statehood in matters of patronage, and worked out a deal with Governor Romero to obtain his support at a presidential primary held in 1980 under local law.

Before becoming President, Ronald Reagan came out in favor of statehood to counteract Castro's influence in the Caribbean - a return to the dominance of the strategic imperative in US - Puerto Rican relations. But in spite of these Presidential expressions, backed by the extended use of patronage to the PNP leadership, there was no majority vote for statehood in the general elections of 1980.

^{a considerable segment of} If the political establishment in Washington ^{has} seemed, during these years, to push Puerto Rico towards statehood, the international community at the U.N., ^{prodded by the Castro government,} pushed Puerto Rico in the opposite direction, towards separatism and independence.

Since 1953, when the UN Resolution on Puerto Rico was adopted, the Assembly ^{complecion} changed greatly. Most of the 75 colonies which had become independent have supported the view expressed by the December 1960 Resolution that in territories which still have not won their independence, "immediate measures should be taken to transfer all power to the people..."

The Cuban Government has taken the initiative in assailing the Commonwealth relationship at the UN Decolonization Committee, ^{also known as the} or the so-called

no Puerto Rican primary and that the UN's international community was committed to respect self-determination of the people of Puerto Rico

No. 100

VE

ap. 20

100

✓

ap. 20

Committee of 24. Working with the leadership of Puerto Rican Socialist Party, particularly with its main exponent, Juan Mari Bras, the Cuban repeated thrusts at the U.N. have been a thorn in the US side. Of late, the Cuban attack on Commonwealth has somewhat tored down, and the possibility of accepting a free association principle has formed its way into the U.N., provided there is a transfer of sovereign rights to Puerto Rico. This principle was adopted by the Decolonization Committee, but was never put to a vote at the Assembly. Free association, as distinct, from independence, maintains a political bond between the metropolitan power and the former colony and it was the basis of the U.N. discussions in 1953. The Commonwealth relationship obviously remains distasteful to Castroism, but (more distasteful has become) the statehood movement, with its connotations of cultural absorption.

Under these circumstances, the Puerto Rican political mind is the subject of a tug of war by outside interests while internally, the sharp, partisan squabbles make very rocky the road to agreement and consensus, ()

In recent years, there has been only one moment when a very fleeting unity was achieved. It was a fleeting unity of sorrow. On April 30, 1962

Muñoz Marín passed away, after several years of failing health. To the very end, he preached the need for strengthening and union with the United States, while preserving Puerto Rico's historic personality. He had labored hard to persuade his colleagues at the Ad Hoc Committee of the advisability of perfecting the relationship by clarifying the prin-

() For a discussion of recent political and legal issues, see Arnold Leibowitz, Colonial Emancipation in the Pacific and the Caribbean (New York, 1936), 35-63; Roberta Ann Johnson, Puerto Rico: Commonwealth or Colony (New York, 1980) and Angel Calderón Cruz, "Las Relaciones Exteriores del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico", Contemporary Caribbean Issues (University of Puerto Rico, 1979), 29-54. Also Gordon K. Lewis, Notes on the Puerto Rican Revolution.

✓ ciple of compact. To this party, he had urged the need for unity and ✓ for the ideal of public service. He had asked for a stop to the po- ✓ litical establishment, the prevailing rampant personalismo and the ✓ debasing of partisan debate. He embodied at the end the ideals he had espoused under Operation Serenity: a vision of a society attracted by the acquisitiveness of material goods and more in harmony with itself and with nature. He ended as an elder statesman whom every body res- pected, but whose voice was that of a solitary prophet, preaching a life- style at odds with the surrounding world.

There was great sadness in Puerto Rico as ~~fully~~ a million people passed by Muñoz' bier or lived streets and roads to see the slow funeral procession winding way to the mountain town of Barranquitas, where Muñoz' remains were laid next to those of his embattled father. After this collective catharsis, this pause to honor the fallen democratic warrior, the people ~~meat~~ ^{went} back to their passionate, bitter, political bickering. In the United States, Muñoz' death was hardly noticed, with the exception of a handful of faithful friends.

Muñoz left behind a Puerto Rico which, in spite of its problems and peuplexities is quite alive with a ^{diverse} destructive ethnics and cultural profiles. ^{But} It is a house very much divided against itself, buffeted by the contrasting pull of external interests - a unique island people very li- ttle understood by outsiders, facing a difficult destiny at the crossroads of the new world.