

## One More Snag

By and large the United States has done well by its island dependency of Puerto Rico.

In the 53 years since the Treaty of Paris gave it to us our government has cooperated with local leaders in building up the native economy and raising the island's living standard. Between 1898 and the end of World War II we spent more than a half billion dollars in direct financial aid there. More important still, we have enlarged the area of self-government in the island from year to year, and Congress now has before it a Puerto Rican constitution which, if approved, will make the area an independent commonwealth within a "union with the United States of America."

If there have been some omissions and miscues in our dealings with our Caribbean dependents, we can compare our record gladly with what other colonial powers have done and with the black story of Soviet imperialism.

There is at present, however, a danger that our good record will be spoiled by last-minute obstruction to the Puerto Rican constitution in Congress. We hope that the level-headed majority in both parties, who have consistently supported liberal Puerto Rican measures, will rally to the constitution and see it through.

In transmitting the constitution to Congress for approval last month President Truman declared that it complied with every condition which Congress had itself set down in the authorizing act of July 3, 1950. He pointed out, moreover, that it was modeled closely on the federal constitution and the constitutions of the several states. It was, he said, a "proud document" embodying "the best of our democratic heritage."

The one thing that opponents are sticking at is Sec. 20, Article II, under the heading Bill of Rights, which affirms certain economic and social rights such as the right of every person to obtain work and have an "adequate" standard of living.

It may not be wise to confuse economic rights, which cannot be legally guaranteed, with political ones, which can. But there is certainly nothing scandalous about the listed "rights," considered as objectives, and the language of the section specifically recognizes that Puerto Rico is not yet ready to make flat promises in this field.

Furthermore, it is not for Congress to pass on the wisdom of every section of the new constitution, provided it does not conflict with the retained rights of the U. S. in Puerto Rico. Either we are prepared to give Puerto Rico self-determination or we are not. We should know better than most that the establishment of a successful government is a matter of trial and error. And Puerto Rico is ready for its try.

Let us keep our record honorable in Puerto Rico.

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