

The Puerto Rican Status Question: A Historical Approach

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On November 7, the people of Puerto Rico will go to the polls to elect the Governor, the members of the insular Senate and House of Representatives and all the local officials. Under their Commonwealth status, they will not vote for President of the United States, nor will they elect senators and representatives to the U. S. Congress. They will elect a Resident Commissioner to represent Puerto Rico in Washington as a member of the House of Representatives. This is, indeed, a general election in Puerto Rico and a sure test of popular sentiments and political trends.

Although Puerto Rico has a Gross National Product of more than 5.5 billion dollars and a per capita income of \$1,700, which is the highest in the Caribbean, conditions are far from satisfactory. Bread and butter issues will be very important at the polls. Inflation is rampant and worse than on the mainland, while the wage level is lower. The wage-price squeeze is felt very acutely by the average worker. Unemployment is around 12% for those actually seeking work, but the figure is higher if proper account is taken of those who have simply given up the search for employment. Pollution is much more of a problem in the tight little island when compared with the U. S. continental vastness. There are plenty of issues to influence the voter's

decision; but there is one which, though not reflected in the polls, is of special relevance to all thoughtful Puerto Ricans: the status question.

Should Puerto Rico apply for admission to the Union as a federal state with the same relations with the Federal Government as the other 50 states? Should Puerto Rico become, instead, a separate republic, patterned after the Costa Rican, the Chilean or the Cuban type? Or should Puerto Rico preserve its present peculiar relationship with the Union, its Commonwealth status, and work towards improving and developing its full potential? These three questions define the status issue as seen from Puerto Rico. They have been present in the Puerto Rican political mind since Commonwealth was achieved in 1952; they have been tested in the 1967 referendum which showed a 60% support of Commonwealth. They are very much alive in the contemporary political debates in the island. The elections are no ^{direct} ~~straight~~ referendum, but whoever wins it will claim for his party the right to pursue the preferred option.

Why do we have this triangular debate in Puerto Rico? Why, in spite of popular support for Commonwealth, do we still discuss other options? Why do some people claim that Commonwealth is only a mid-way station and that the issue will simplify itself into a straight, sharp, unavoidable confrontation between statehood and independence? Will the Puerto Ricans ever achieve a real consensus which will put the status question to rest? Will they really opt for independence as the more radical groups want? Will they demand statehood as the more conservative elements urge?

To the outsider the Puerto Ricans trilemma -not dilemma- is a difficult thing to grasp. The Latin Americans, particularly those possessed of an anti-U.S.

bias, feel very strongly that Puerto Rico should be independent and they can not understand any other solution as a viable and permanent possibility. To the North American, there is usually a sense of amazement at Puerto Rico's behaviour. Why is Puerto Rico not applying for statehood as Alaska and Hawaii did? And some who praise Commonwealth believe that Puerto Rico is having the best of two possible worlds since no Federal income taxes or local income are paid by the residents of the island, under the principle of no taxation, without representation. In the meantime, at the UN, under the prodding of Castro's delegate, the Committee on Decolonization has adopted a rather ambiguous resolution asking for a study of the Puerto Rican case.

It is obvious that the status question in Puerto Rico is quite a riddle for everybody. I have been asked to unravel it to-day and I shall try to do my best. I shall begin by saying that I have strongly supported Commonwealth status. However, I am not here to deliver a partisan lecture; but to explain, in fair and objective terms, the nature of the Puerto Rican trilemma. As far as I am concerned, I set forth as a basic consideration that it is up to the people of Puerto Rico to decide what they want to be, and to exercise their right of self-determination, and it is the duty of the Congress of the United States to respect the Puerto Rican decision. But a theoretical assertion can only be fully understood within a given historical reality. To understand the status question on Puerto Rico, we must understand its history, the variable factors which influenced its evolution. As a student of Puerto Rican history, I shall now address myself to explaining those variables, to setting the Puerto Rican trilemma within a time - space continuum.

Let's first consider three determining factors: the Spanish heritage, the population growth and the strategic role of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493, but active colonization began in 1508. The island remained in Spanish hands until 1898, when, as a result of the Spanish American War, it was ceded by Spain to the United States in the Treaty of Paris. Puerto Rico is, then, one of the oldest Spanish settlements in the New World. Spain was present in the island as a colonizing power, many years before she was actually settling and developing the mainland. Puerto Rico was her last possession; hence, the Spanish influence in Puerto Rico is deeper and has a longer history than in any other Spanish area in the New World. Even after nearly three-quarters of a century of close relationship to the U. S., there are many Puerto Rican families with Spanish ties, thousands of Puerto Ricans go to Spain for their education, and to many Puerto Ricans, Spain is still a sort of Old Country, a "Madre Patria" from whence came the language, the old traditions, the pattern of "familismo", the Catholic religion, the folklore, the mores. The Spanish influence, therefore, is a basic factor in Puerto Rico's development. This sense that there is a Spanish heritage to preserve, a heritage that has not been wholly destroyed by U. S. institutions and life-style, a legacy which links the island to the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America; this feeling of belonging, in many ways and shapes, to a cultural stream with a Mediterranean and West Indian background, is an important consideration to bear in mind when discussing the status question and the nature of the Puerto Rican trilemma.

Puerto Rico stands in the middle Antillean area in a key geographical

position. The island commands some of the main entrances to the Caribbean. In earlier centuries, her strategic position made her a natural defensive outpost for the protection of the lifelines of the Spanish Empire. She was called a "Christian Rhodes", by the Spaniards; at the end of the Nineteenth Century, Admiral Alfred T. Mahan was to call her an American Malta. The strategic situation has heavily influenced the island's evolution. It explains to a very high degree the American presence in Puerto Rico and has been a determining variable regarding the political status, for it involved Puerto Rico as a priced pawn in the Caribbean power game.

Population is another significant variable. It grew slowly in the early centuries, but the rate of growth quickened by the end of the XVIIIth century. There were 44,500 Puerto Ricans in 1765; 150,000 in 1800; 600,000 by 1860 and nearly a million by 1900. Already by 1866, José Julián Acosta, one of Puerto Rico's main economic and social thinkers, considered Puerto Rico one of the densest populated areas in the New World, right after Barbados. The observation still holds; as Puerto Rico approaches 800 persons per square mile as compared with 57.4 for the United States, according to the 1970 census. The pressure of population upon natural resources has been an outstanding factor in the island's social history and is reflected on the status controversy.

The triangular options which define and encompass this controversy are not just the products of the Twentieth Century. They are rooted in the political history of Puerto Rico before 1898 and were at first concerned with the nature of Puerto Rico's relations with Spain. The question was posed early in the

Nineteenth Century at the time of the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula. The Supreme Junta, which emerged as a Provisional Government in the Spanish uprising against Napoleon, asked Puerto Rico to send a member to the Junta as was done with respect to all other possessions, to be selected by the local cabildos. The Royal Decree of 1809 requested that this be done "since the Island is not properly a Colony or a ^{trade post} Factory as other foreign colonies are, but an integral part of the Spanish Monarchy...." Representation in the Junta, as later at the Spanish Cortes, was based on this principle of integration. Puerto Rico was to be ruled as any other province of Spain. This is, therefore, the early expression of what we have called in Puerto Rico, asimilismo, -an absorption of Puerto Rico within the government structure of Spain to be ruled as any other province, with the same rights and duties.

During the second short constitutional regime in Spain (1821-1823), another view was set forth. Those were difficult years for Spain. The revolutionary movement in Spanish America was on the upswing. The idea of winning back the colonies through integration had not proved feasible. A great Cuban intellectual, Father Félix Varela, and a Puerto Rican deputy, José María Quiñones, evolved a new concept, patterned after the British experience with provincial assemblies and self-government in Canada and Jamaica. A formal proposal was introduced in the Cortes and approved by them in 1823, although the Bourbon restoration did away with the Cortes and their work. The gist of the proposal was to give broad powers of self-government to the Deputaciones Provinciales -or provincial assemblies- including the right to make their own budgets and to veto any decree issued by the Governor. The main consideration behind the proposal was the awareness of

the differences between Spain and the overseas provinces, the peculiarities which forced a special regime, a special connection, within the context of union with Spain. Here we find the roots of autonomismo -of self-government in the Spanish period. It is interesting to note that the British influence was already present. Autonomismo as a political philosophy was to grow in Spain and the islands at the same time that the British empirically developed the trend towards dominion status throughout the Nineteenth Century.

The third important trend was the one towards separation. Its roots were varied. The alliance between the French Republic and Spain which turned the latter into a French satellite in international affairs brought French Republicans into Puerto Rico at the end of the XVIIIth Century. They planted the seed of separation at a time when Napoleon was trying to win the support of Spanish America, by offering independence to the Indies. But of much greater impact was the influence of revolutionary events in Venezuela. There is enough historical evidence to show that between 1810 and 1824, several groups conspired in Puerto Rico to bring about separation from Spain. They belonged to the emerging Puerto Rican landed or professional bourgeoisie and some were members of the clergy. They lacked, however, a broad base of support and were unable to win over the local militia. Spanish power was too great and vigilance was extreme. The most serious effort to win independence through a military coup, with infiltration in the local army, took place in 1838. The plan aborted and the separatist movement was dealt a serious blow, but the trend, nevertheless, was established.

Puerto Rico, however, continued to be ruled through a concentration of powers in an authoritarian governor. In 1837, the island was promised special

laws -apparently, a return to the autonomista position. But the special laws never came. Again, in the 1866 - 1873 period, reform and revolution in Spain brought to the fore the possibility of full integration. Asimilismo seemed to prevail after 1870; Puerto Rico was actually represented in the Spanish Cortes, but the old centralization persisted. After 1874, elections were manipulated by the conservatives to assure the preponderance of the Spanish bureaucratic and military clique in the island. By 1887, asimilismo was on the decline and autonomismo -with its promise of a strong insular parliament and the control of the insular budget-loomed as a solution for the Puerto Rican liberals.

In the meantime, the old separatist tendency emerged again. It's most important effort was the Lares revolution of 1868. As in 1838, it was also an abortive attempt, but a revolutionary government was actually set up and independence proclaimed before the movement collapsed. From Lares to 1898, we see two trends within the separatists: one favors an Antillean federation with Cuba and Santo Domingo; the other, annexation to the United States as a full federal state.

When the Puerto Ricans join the Cuban Revolutionary Party in New York and set up a Puerto Rican section in 1896, the two trends will be represented. Ramón Emeterio Betances, ^{who had been the driving force behind the Lares revolt,} an eminent doctor, and Eugenio María de Hostos, a distinguished ^{and social thinker} educator, will favor the Antillean federation; Betances as an agent in Europe of the Cuban movement and Hostos in Santiago de Chile. The Chairman of the Puerto Rican Section will be Dr. José Julio Henna, an avowed annexionist. It is Dr. Henna who with the Secretary of the Section, Roberto H. Todd, will ask Theodore Roosevelt in March 1898, to invade Puerto Rico as a war operation. By the end of 1897, Spain

will grant to the island an Autonomous Charter which will receive strong backing from the Puerto Rican liberals, led by an outstanding man, Luis Muñoz Rivera. Autonomismo therefore, had at last a historical chance in Puerto Rico just as the war broke out. By 1899, autonomismo was through; a U. S. military government was in control and the old questions were posed again, this time in terms of a new metropolis. How was Puerto Rico to be governed? As a colony? As a U. S. territory? As a State of the Union, fully incorporated? As a different and special kind of State? Or was it to be granted independence, to enable it to achieve separation?

The over-riding interest in the U. S. move to occupy Puerto Rico, as far as I have been able to find in my research, was strategic. Possession of Puerto Rico was a key element in achieving mastery of the Caribbean, and in protecting the approaches to the future Isthmian canal. Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge and other jingoes of the day, wanted Spain out of the hemisphere. They were ready to grant independence to Cuba, but desired to retain Puerto Rico. President William McKinley came to adopt their viewpoint by May-June, 1898. Since Puerto Rico was not engaged in a rebellion against Spain, as Cuba and the Phillipines were, and the Spaniards were hardly prepared to face the Americans, the conquest of Puerto Rico was easily achieved and the U. S. troops were welcome as liberators by a considerable segment of the population particularly in the southern and western parts. The Puerto Ricans expected Puerto Rico to be declared an incorporated territory and there was general consensus by the end of 1898 that the island was heading towards statehood. A colonial form of government was held to be against the traditions and institutions of the U. S.

McKinley and Elihu Root had other ideas. Root soon became, after his appointment as Secretary of War, the main architect of the Administration policies towards Puerto Rico, together with the last of the military governors, George C. Davis. Root was what we may call an enlightened imperialist, but an imperialist nevertheless. He felt that the U. S. had a mission to teach Puerto Rico the essentials of self-government, -and should act as the good tutor- but that the island, because of its Hispanic traditions, was unfit to become a State of the Union. He was rather cool to the granting of U. S. citizenship. His ideal was a colonial government patterned somewhat after the British royal colony type, with due regard for the U. S. territorial tradition. A governor, with highly centralized powers appointed by the U. S. President; ~~with~~ an Executive Council, also of Presidential appointment, to be a sort of Upper House; and a House of Delegates, elected by the people: such were the highlights of the Root plan which with minor modifications became the Foraker Law in 1900, the first U. S. civil law for Puerto Rico approved by a Congress which was given total power over the island according to the Treaty of Paris.

The Foraker Act established eventually free trade between the United States and Puerto Rico, thus promoting the full integration of Puerto Rico within the U. S. economic system. It maintained Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory, which ["]belonged to ["]but was not a part of ["]the U. S., according to the Supreme Court. The island did not have to pay Federal Taxes, and could, therefore, collect its own internal revenues to set up a budget and pay for the government. The law was essentially a colonial Act, and as such was received in Puerto Rico. A substantial segment of public opinion opposed the workings of the Act. In their view,

the U. S. did not promise Puerto Rican full integration as a State; the law smacked of colonialism, and failed to promise eventual independence as in the case of the Philippines. The U. S. policies sharpened the debate on the status question which now was posed again, in different terms. The assimilationist position became pro-statehood; in other words, it favored full integration or incorporation into the Union; the separatist position now argued for outright independence; the old autonomistas favored home-rule and pointed to the British experience with Canada or Ireland.

What we want to stress at this stage is that the lack of a clear U. S. commitment in 1898-1900 and the absence of a definite policy aimed at a specific status based on self-government, are as much responsible for the rebirth of the status question under the U. S. flag as is the century-old controversy between the Puerto Ricans. And while the U. S. took what was essentially a colonial stance, the governors under the Foraker Act, insisted on the full Americanization of Puerto Rico, meaning by that term the uprooting of the Spanish heritage. This was particularly present in the educational field where a determined effort was made to make English the language of instruction and to downgrade the Spanish traditions and values. Americanization also meant the effective economic penetration in the sugar field, until the sugar industry was dominated, to a large measure, by powerful U. S. based corporations.

This was a policy of contradictions: U. S. bureaucrats in Puerto Rico wanted sincerely to teach good democratic habits to Puerto Ricans; to bring about universal education and promote social mobility; to establish observance of individual rights; to improve health and communications and to add a Yankee zest to the more sedate Spanish culture. But as some of the more perceptive Americans saw, you can

not improve democracy from above, nor talk about self-government while the Executive is almost all-powerful and not responsible to the people; nor speak of the American Way and deny citizenship and recognition to the country.

The Puerto Rican response took three different positions: There were those who felt that Americanization should be embraced as quickly as possible and the U. S. Government position be fully sustained, so that the United States would come to trust Puerto Ricans and the way, therefore, shortened, for a request of statehood. Any other position became suspect and harmful, in their view, to the people of Puerto Rico. Since the Republicans were in power in the States, the group that favored this position led by a colored Doctor, José Celso Barbosa, came to be known as Republicans. Hence, the Republican party in Puerto Rico has been essentially with the pro-statehood position.

The other Puerto Rican position was one of intense dissatisfaction and even bitterness. The Foraker Act was looked upon as sheer colonialism in its political aspects. The Americanization process, with its emphasis on downgrading Spanish as a language as well as the old culture, was considered distasteful. The only solution was to work towards separation. By 1904, pro-independence feeling began to coalesce; by 1910, it had become quite vocal within the Union Party, which was a direct successor to the old autonomista party under Spain and held control of the Lower House.

The third position was also clearly opposed to U. S. policies; it wanted full self-government or home-rule. It believed that through persistent effort, changes could be brought about in the island's status with a view to an autonomous solution within the U. S. system. We have in this emerging position, the beginning of a trend of thinking which at the half-century ~~had~~ led

to the present Commonwealth Status. One basic objective was to assure for the island full control of the budget and to preserve its fiscal autonomy.

It was, indeed, a quarrel over the budget which brought about a serious confrontation in 1909, and though both the President and Congress took positions inimical to the Puerto Rican majority in the House of Delegates or Lower House, the way was opened for a reform of the Foraker Act. When it came in 1917, due in considerable measure to the Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner, Luis Muñoz Rivera, U. S. citizenship was granted, as well as an Insular Senate, but the powers of the Governor, appointed by the President, were little affected, and there was no promise of statehood or independence. In fact, the law was approved partly to tone down the feelings for independence, but the lack of a definite goal kept the status question very much alive. "We don't want you to be independent", -Congress seemed to say- "We want you to be now good American citizens, but we don't promise statehood". This position satisfied the Republican party in the island. They felt that the extension of citizenship meant eventual statehood, no matter what Congress said. But the Republicans were a minority; the Union Party, with its large majorities, hailed the Jones Act only as a step to full self-government or eventual independence. The status question was on.

In the 20's the third position -home-rule- began to be more clearly defined. A group of Puerto Rican jurists, careful students of American constitutional law, came to the conclusion that non-incorporation opened the way for a new type of state within the American Union. They were encouraged by a memorandum prepared

in 1914, by a young clerk in the War Department, Felix Frankfurter, who was later to achieve great distinction in the U. S. Supreme Court. They also studied the Free State formula, devised for Ireland by the British Parliament, and in the early Twenties were ready to propose a new status, the Estado Libre Asociado, the Free Associated State, which was embodied in a bill known as the Campbell Bill, submitted to Congress in 1922. Under the Bill, the U. S. would have a Resident Commissioner in the island, invested with powers to call upon the armed forces in case of rebellion and put the island under martial law, and could suspend any law, pending the President's final decision. The Governor was to be elective, the judicial power was also to be locally appointed, and all judgments rendered by the Court were to be final, except in cases involving the interpretation of a constitutional provision or a U. S. law. While it was understood to be a significant step forward, the Campbell Bill would be, if approved, an unilateral act of Congress with no popular expression of self-determination. It was promptly put aside by an indifferent Congress.

The status question faded into the background, as Puerto Rico was gripped by the depression. With a rapidly growing population and the economy in awful shape, the island's social and economic ills came to the fore. This was the period when Puerto Rico was called, in Governor Rexford Gay Tugwell's apt phrase, the Stricken Island. The collapse of U. S. colonial policies was evident, as was the failure of Congress to take due account of the island's plight.

The immediate result of this situation was to polarize political opinion in Puerto Rico into two main trends: independence vs. statehood. Independence feelings ran high with two visible expressions: one, which wanted to achieve separation through the electoral process; the other, which preached revolutionary action and

was strongly anti-U.S. Luis Muñoz Marín came to represent the former; Pedro Albizu Campos, the latter. Control of the insular legislature was in the hands of a coalition of Republicans and Socialists, both groups favoring statehood.

The challenge to U. S. power in Puerto Rico in the Thirties by Albizu Campos and his Nationalist party did not have strong popular support, but it was violent, and for the first time in the Twentieth Century it created a revolutionary tradition in Puerto Rico. Ever since Albizu, the pro-independence movement has been faced with this dilemma; either to achieve separation by developing a strong democratic party at the polls, or to obtain independence through direct revolutionary action, Albizu was a revolutionary mystic, a man of deep personal fervor, and a lover of Spain and its ancient glories. He had little in common, save the passion for independence, with the new revolutionaries who are heavily influenced by the marxist movements for national liberation.

The emphasis in Puerto Rico was more towards social and economic reform than towards revolution. Popular support was given to Muñoz Marín in 1940 when he decided to put aside for the time being the status question, and to emphasize, instead, a program of reform to be carried out by legislation. In turning towards intense social and economic action, Muñoz had the support of the New Dealers, particularly of Rexford G. Tugwell, who was sent as Governor by President Roosevelt after Muñoz victory as head of the Popular Democratic Party in 1940.

As Muñoz began to implement his reform program and to issue in an era of unprecedented personal political power which lasted 24 years, the status controversy was revived. Was this reform movement to lead into an independent Puerto Rico? Or was statehood still a valid objective, as preached by the Republican

Party, which became the main opposition force from 1940 to 1952?

Muñoz' approach became highly empirical. His main concern was to raise the living standards, to streamline government, to create new wealth, to provide effective social services and do away with extreme want. Time and again, he insisted that the people were not for the status, but the status was to suit the people. Between 1944 and 1948, he came to the conclusion that outright separation would place Puerto Rico outside the U. S. market. With the increasing population growth, there was no way out but industrialization, and industrialization required access to the U. S. market. Anything else -including statehood with its federal fiscal system applicable to the island- would make extremely difficult Puerto Rico's development or might spell economic down. Together with other leaders, particularly Dr. Antonio Fernós Isern, the search was on for an intermediate formula.

The pro-independence group within the Popular Party became highly dissatisfied. They felt that Muñoz had betrayed their trust and refused to follow his leadership. They established a new Party, the Puerto Rican Independence Party or PIP, and, therefore, provided a political channel for those who favored separation, but would not support ^{direct} revolutionary action.

Muñoz' first objective was to liberalize the Jones Act by obtaining from Congress a bill to have an elective Governor. This step was taken in 1947, and Muñoz was elected Governor in 1948. Between 1948 and 1952, Muñoz as Governor and Dr. Fernós as Resident Commissioner in Washington developed the main steps that led to Commonwealth status. On July 3, 1950, Public Law 600 was approved by the

Congress, "in the nature of a compact so that the People of Puerto Rico may organize a government pursuant to a constitution of their own adoption". The novel principle involved was that the law had to be approved by the people of Puerto Rico in a referendum. It was not, therefore, a unilateral decision. A complex situation followed. The basic Federal-Puerto Rican relations were left untouched, but all matters dealing with the internal government of Puerto Rico were now studied and embodied in a Puerto Rican constitution, framed by elected delegates and approved by a popular referendum. The pro-independence group refused to participate in the process of constitution making, but the pro-statehood leaders did, arguing that the constitution would ^{not} bar the way to statehood.

Albizu's party tried to stop the voting process by staging a short lived rebellion which was to coincide with the assassination attempt ^{on} both Muñoz and President Truman in October, 1950. This violent act failed to stop the constitutional process. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (in Spanish: Estado Libre Asociado) was proclaimed on July 25, 1952. Muñoz and his party took the position that self-government had now been achieved, through popular consent; that Commonwealth was a definite status, capable of further growth within the principle of compact; and that an effective association had been established with the United States. Puerto Rico was not incorporated as a state, but was a different kind of state through association with the Union.

To the old dichotomy of statehood vs. independence, which was so prevalent in the Thirties, Commonwealth was now added. The solution failed to satisfy the pro-independence groups. They argued that Puerto Rico was a colony, that Commonwealth

was a creature of Congress, that federal powers over the island remained intact and that Muñoz, therefore, had fooled the people. The statehooders, who at first collaborated by supporting Muñoz efforts in Congress or by participating in the Constitutional convention, could not accept the view that Commonwealth was permanent. They also denounced it as a colonial status, with inferior rights under the U. S. Constitution to those enjoyed by the people of other states. In spite of Muñoz' efforts and his repeated victory at the polls, he was unable to persuade the opposition, and the status issue remained very much alive.

In the meantime, a profound social and economic transformation took place. Industry came to the island through a program of industrial incentives, and changed the landscape, the income and the mores. Per capita income which was less than \$140 in 1940, jumped to more than \$1,000 in 1967 and is now \$1,700. By 1967, income from manufacture had outstripped agricultural income: 678.2 millions from manufacturing to \$182 millions from agriculture. Puerto Rico became essentially an urban country, with more people living in towns than in the rural areas. A new middle class emerged and educational opportunities were multiplied. *But the population pressure forced the ^{increased} migration to the U.S.*

Moved by his desire to give permanence to Commonwealth status by broadening the bases of local power over areas where federal power was still overwhelming, Muñoz tried to get Congress ^{in 1959-1963} to revise the Federal-Relations Act which, as part of the compact, defined the areas of federal jurisdiction. Muñoz' move was criticized by the opposition and Congress demurred. Finally, in 1965 a Status Commission was created with representation from the three main parties. ^{as well as from the Congress.} The Commission Report, issued in 1966, included some excellent background studies

on the status question and recommended a plebiscite. This was held in 1967, and 60.4 (425,132) 60% of the vote went to Commonwealth; 39% (274,312) 39% to statehood and only .06 (4258) 5% to independence, but one has to point out that a segment of the independence vote abstained. There was, however, a basic consensus that Commonwealth had been preferred by the people and that they had given a mandate to develop it to the fullest self-government compatible with the concept of association.

The rise of statehood sentiment, in large measure due to the admission of Alaska and Hawaii into the Union, plus the political schism inside the Popular Democratic Party after Muñoz retired from the governorship paved the way for a very narrow victory in 1968 by the New Progressive Party (NPP), an offshoot of the old Republican Party. The Party, now in power, is led by an old foe of Commonwealth and a determined statehooder, Luis A. Ferré. Although a minority Governor, Ferré after the election pushed for statehood before American public opinion by requesting the open support of the state governors.

The divisions within the Popular Democratic party (PDP) plus the rise of a new generation of leftist leaders influenced by Castro and Allende, turned the PIP into a party committed to socialism, under the fiery, Yale-educated young leader, Rubén Berríos. On the PIP's left, there is the Movement For Independence, now an outright socialist-marxist party, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, which favors revolutionary action. This movement is led by Juan Mari Bras. The new pro-independence leadership has held the view that the political future of Puerto Rico will finally involve a confrontation between statehood and independence. Therefore, it is to their interest to downgrade and fiercely attack the Commonwealth position. A more moderate pro-independence group is the Puerto Rican Union Party, led by a university professor, Antonio González.

They have succeeded in getting some attention focused on Puerto Rico with the help of Castro's delegate at the UN Decolonization Committee. The Committee, last August, through a close vote of 12 in favor and 10 abstentions, decided to reexamine the case of Puerto Rico to ^{determine} see if the General Assembly would discuss it again. In 1953, the Assembly had approved a Resolution declaring that Puerto Rico had achieved self-government and was no longer to be included on the list of ~~the~~ non-self-governing territories. The pro-independence leadership has hailed the recent UN committee action as a great victory, but, as was to be expected, the action drew fire from both the PNP government party, and the PDP. The latter approved a Resolution in the Senate, reaffirming Puerto Rico's commitment to Commonwealth and to the right ^{to} of self-determination without outside interference.

As we approach the crucial November election, the issues have been drawn. The Popular Democratic Party is committed to the preservation and development of Commonwealth as a permanent relationship with the U. S., and to carrying out the plebiscite result with the view of enlarging some key areas of local authority as well as increased participation in federal decisions. The NPP is insisting on permanent union as a gateway to statehood; it favors the Presidential vote as the next step. The PIP is committed to bringing about independence through negotiation with the United States, with the aim of establishing a socialist regime. There are three other splinter parties, with little chance of electing anybody.

At present, we are engaged in Puerto Rico in the battle of the polls. We lack independent poll-taking such as the Harris or Gallup polls. Most polls have been ordered by the parties themselves. But there is a strong feeling on

the part of many observers that it is a very tight race between the Government Party, the PIP, and the Popular Democratic Party, now led by a young lawyer, Rafael Hernández Colón, who has done a remarkable job of reorganizing the Party and is running for Governor against the incumbent, Luis A. Ferré. The PIP seems to be a distant third. Over 1 million votes will probably be cast in the election. And we shall know on November 8th whether the trend towards Commonwealth which started in the late Forties, has been definitely reversed. For that to happen, the Government Party would have to win by a landslide. *If the PDP wins, the drive will be on for a reform of the present status* Even so, Puerto Rico is far from an overwhelming consensus, and the status question -the historical trilemma- will still be with us in the immediate future.