

*Article 9*

REPORT ON THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE  
TRAINING CENTER IN PUERTO RICO

Based on Observations and Interviews  
in Puerto Rico

December 14 to 19, 1955

Francis R. Valeo, Staff Consultant,  
Subcommittee on Technical Assistance Programs,  
Committee on Foreign Relations

12



## 1. Introduction

In the past, Puerto Rico was portrayed throughout the world as something of a backwash of the Western Hemisphere, with a disease-ridden, illiterate and starving population. This condition was generally attributed either to the inadequacies of the Puerto Ricans themselves or to the exploitation of the United States. Many trainees under the Technical Assistance program arrive in Puerto Rico with a preconception of this kind. They are often skeptical, both as to the adequacy of the island's training facilities and its utility as an area for the observation of the techniques of economic development.

What they find on arrival must come as something of a shock to them. Those from underdeveloped areas discover standards of living in Puerto Rico which are already higher than most Latin American countries and are rising rapidly. Instead of an exploited American colony, they find a democratic self-governing commonwealth with an effective government, independent in internal affairs and strong in its support of the present ties with the United States. In fact, Puerto Ricans were largely responsible for establishing the nature of these ties which were set forth in Public Law 447, passed by the 82d Congress of the United States in 1952. X

It is true that trainees will see the slums which still pockmark San Juan and other cities and they will see depressed rural areas. But they will also see vigorous action being taken to correct these and other undesirable conditions. They will see, in short, a Puerto Rico that is today in the midst of a profound economic and social transition which promises to transform what was once regarded as a hopelessly backward land into one of the most progressive in Latin America.

The pace of the transition is very rapid. Nevertheless, the Puerto Ricans are managing in the process to retain what is essentially a Latin American heritage while they blend into it the cultural values and the techniques of the United States.



Because of the size of the Commonwealth -- it is considerably smaller than the state of Connecticut -- the transition is readily visible to all, even to those who visit the island merely for short tours of observation.

It is taking place in circumstances which are for the most part far more unfavorable than those which exist in the countries from which exchangees come. The island is endowed with only the most limited resources in arable land and other natural wealth. It has one of the highest densities of population in the world. Yet, until recently almost the sole major source of income was the land. In short, Puerto Rico presents a fundamental challenge of survival and progress to its inhabitants that is similar to, if not greater than that faced by most visiting observers and exchangees in their home countries.

In that sense, it provides an ideal setting for the training program. It enables visitors from underdeveloped lands to see a replica of familiar problems and, more important, what can be done about them.

To some extent statistics indicate the scope of achievement in Puerto Rico. In 1940 per capita income was \$122; this year it has reached \$436, higher than most Latin American countries. In 1940 life expectancy was 46 years; it is now 61 years. Illiteracy is now 15 per cent or less; in 1900 it was 80%.

Even more impressive to observers, however, is likely to be unmistakable evidence of development on every hand. Throughout the island, housing construction and road building are going forward at a rapid pace. Under special tax and other incentives, some 300 or more modern industries, financed by capital from within the island, the mainland, and elsewhere, are in operation or going into operation. There is an atmosphere of activity and progress almost everywhere in the island.

It is probably no exaggeration to say, as did the Chase National Bank in its June 1952 edition of "Latin American Highlights", that Puerto Rico as an area registered the greatest progress in the preceding decade in all the world.

This progress undoubtedly has derived in great measure from the efforts



of the Puerto Ricans themselves under what they call "operation bootstrap." The term is meant to suggest the mobilization of the people to explore and exploit every practical possibility of utilizing constructively their meager natural resources and their great resources in population to raise standards of living largely by their own efforts.

It should be pointed out, however, that the present prosperity of the island is not derived solely from measures of self-help, and it would be misleading for trainees to take away that impression. Puerto Rico's unique relationship with the United States provides certain advantages which are not available to the countries from which most of the exchangees come.

Out of its commonwealth ties with the United States, Puerto Rico obtains many advantages. It participates in Federal aid programs to states, but it pays no Federal taxes. Furthermore, the Federal Government remits customs receipts collected in the island to the Commonwealth government. The island's industry and agriculture have ready access to the United States market. As citizens of the United States, Puerto Ricans can migrate freely to the mainland and the remittances of migrants to families in the island constitute an important source of income. Finally, United States military expenditures are a major source of revenue. The Federal Government maintains important installations in the island, with consequent expenditures by the Federal Government and by servicemen stationed there. Puerto Ricans also serve in the armed forces at pay scales normally exceeding the rates which could be earned in the island.

To point out the advantages which accrue to Puerto Rico from its present status of commonwealth is not to deprecate the outstanding effort which the Puerto Ricans are making themselves. Nor is it criticism of the Act of Congress of 1952 which provided that status. That legislation in effect provided reciprocal advantages to the United States. Moreover, Congress in its liberal treatment of the island undoubtedly took into consideration the fact that Puerto Rico, despite its progress, ranked far below the level of any state in the Union in per capita income,

J.



health standards, and other yardsticks of progress.

The fact remains, nevertheless, that the commonwealth relationship has provided a kind of financial underpinning for Puerto Rican development which is not generally available to other underdeveloped regions. This element in the situation should not be ignored in the orientation of trainees under the Technical Assistance program. Failure to make it clear could lead to false hopes and an inaccurate concept of the potentialities of technical aid.

## 2. Nature of the Training Program in Puerto Rico

The Point Four program has been in operation in Puerto Rico since 1950. At its own request Puerto Rico has not been a recipient under the program but a co-sponsor of training programs for foreign students. The Commonwealth government has appropriated some \$35,000 annually over the past five years towards maintenance of the program. In addition, various departments of the island government contribute in time and effort to provide in-service training and facilities for observation to foreign exchangees.

The ICA has contracted to supply the Puerto Rican government with not to exceed some \$60,000 to help maintain projects in Puerto Rico and to train exchangees under its programs. In addition, the United States provides \$251,000 a year to pay for the vocational training of students from the Caribbean dependencies of Great Britain, France and the Netherlands.

The principal part of the joint U.S.-Commonwealth contribution goes for the subsistence of exchangees. Other major expenditures are for administrative salaries and for tuition.

A total of over 2,000 scholarship grantees, visitors and observers were handled in Puerto Rico between May 1950 and June 1955. The preponderance have come from Latin America and the Caribbean territories. In recent years, the number of exchangees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East has been increasing. Last year, for example, of the 781 exchangees, 205 were from those regions.



Exchangees remain in Puerto Rico anywhere from several days to a year or more. Their training takes place at the University of Puerto Rico, at vocational schools (mostly in San Juan), and in various Puerto Rican Government offices. They receive training and opportunities for observation in such fields as agricultural extension, low-cost housing construction, water resources, and power development and community improvement, as well as in many vocational pursuits. X

Some ICA exchangees are trained entirely in Puerto Rico. Others are sent to the island for part of their training either before or after completing a period of study in the States.

### 3. Organization and Operations of the Training Program

The training program is administered by the Office of Technical Cooperation, which is a division of the Department of State of the Puerto Rican Government. The office is staffed entirely by Puerto Ricans. The procedures for handling trainees are essentially the same regardless of the program under which they are sponsored.

An exchangee, sent to Puerto Rico by ICA would be treated in the following fashion. After the Commonwealth Office of Technical Cooperation has indicated that he can be accomodated, he would proceed to the island, either directly from his home country or via the United States. A program would be worked out for him in advance, subject to revision on arrival. The exchangee's program, if of any duration would normally include study at the University of Puerto Rico or some other institution of learning in the island, combined with or followed by in-service training in Puerto Rican government agencies. Normal tuition fees are paid out of the funds of the program to the schools which may be involved. The Puerto Rican government is not reimbursed for the in-service training which it provides.

The Office of Technical Cooperation of the Puerto Rican Government is responsible for general supervision and guidance to the trainees while they are

6



in the island. It exercises these functions by means of direct contact with the trainees and progress reports prepared by the institutions or agencies to which they are assigned. ICA, Washington, is in turn kept informed by reports from the Office of Technical Cooperation.

#### 4. Estimate of Program

The Puerto Rican Government has established an effective procedure for receiving, training, and guiding exchangees whether they come to the island under United States or other auspices. Commonwealth personnel connected with the administration of the program who were interviewed generally demonstrated a clear comprehension of the objectives of the Technical Assistance program as well as its limitations. They revealed, moreover, significant, and sympathetic insight into the problems of assisting foreign trainees to adjust to study and training in the island. Numerous trainees interviewed expressed the highest esteem for the individuals responsible for administering the program, as well as for Puerto Ricans in general. T A

With respect to educational facilities, the University of Puerto Rico, as well as vocational and other schools in the island, generally follow the same educational methods as are used in mainland institutions. They have the added advantage, however, in having considerable experience in educational problems peculiar to depressed areas. Furthermore, instruction is largely in Spanish so that, as far as Latin American trainees are concerned, language difficulties common in connection with exchangees on the mainland are not generally present in Puerto Rico. For observers and students from other areas, however, there are language problems even though English is almost universally spoken as a second tongue in San Juan and other major centers of population.

#### 5. Recommendations

I was informed that consideration is being given to enlarging the informational coverage of the training program in Puerto Rico by the United States



Information Agency. Certainly a highly effective story can be told abroad. It is a story that reflects credit on both the United States and the Commonwealth and it is not well-known outside the island. It should be told, however, with a measure of modest restraint and in reasonable perspective, or more harm than good will result.

Fullest possible utilization of the training facilities in Puerto Rico should continue to be made by the ICA. At present, however, the administrative structure for the training program in the island appears to be taxed to the utmost. Any added load without adequate preparation may work a hardship on the Puerto Rican Government or result in a lowering of standards.

The University and the vocational schools could probably absorb an increased number of exchangees. Housing conditions for students in San Juan, however, are tight. There is some talk of establishing an "International House" residence on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico in order to alleviate the situation. That type of undertaking, however, would appear best left to the initiative of private foundations and the University.

Selection of trainees is a major key to an effective exchange program whether in Puerto Rico or on the mainland. For reasons previously mentioned, Puerto Rico offers the most to trainees from Latin America and especially to those from the Caribbean countries. With respect to trainees from other areas, caution must be exercised by ICA in Washington to make certain that there is a genuine utility -- apart from merely impressing them -- in sending them to Puerto Rico, particularly for long periods of training.

Consideration should be given to a wider utilization of Puerto Rican technicians in ICA missions abroad. Although the supply of skilled personnel in the island is limited and the internal demand great, it may be possible to recruit or even to train an increased number of specialists in Puerto Rico, perhaps through special arrangements with the University or the Puerto Rican Government for service in other countries.



Consideration should be given to establishing a regular program of orientation of mainland technicians in Puerto Rico prior to their assignment to missions abroad, especially in Latin America. Such training, even if it is of relatively short duration, should prove of great value. The technicians would familiarize themselves in advance with technical problems similar to those which they are likely to encounter at the post of assignment. At the same time, for those with little or no experience in living abroad, a short residence in Puerto Rico would provide a "half-way" point in the adjustment to foreign cultures. It would tend to reduce the likelihood of adverse reactions and negative attitudes when they arrive at their post of assignment.

#### 6. Concluding Remarks

To sum up, the training center in Puerto Rico appears to me to be an important asset for the United States in carrying out the Technical Assistance program. Its direct value derives from the excellent setting which the Commonwealth provides for the observation and study of problems of development, its education facilities, and the skill and sensitivity of the employees responsible for carrying out the program. /

The training center also has an indirect value in that exchangees, who sometimes have a negative view of United States policies, are likely to be / favorably impressed by what they find in Puerto Rico. The better understanding of mainland-commonwealth relations which they obtain may contribute to an improvement in their attitude towards the policies and international motives of this country.

January 27, 1956