

THE FUTURE OF COMMONWEALTH

INTRODUCTION.-

July 25, 1972 will mark the 74th anniversary of the landing of American troops in Guánica, Puerto Rico, pursuant to the fortunes, adversities and vagaries of the Spanish American War of 1898. It will mark also the 20th anniversary of the organization of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico as a juridical and operational reality "freely and permanently associated with the United States".

Under Commonwealth 2,700,000 U. S. citizens of Latin America origin face, in relative peace and within the democratic process, lasting and pressing questions of cultural readjustment, change, rapid and autonomous development, vertiginous social mobility, technology, alienation, freedom, double and at times seemingly irreconcilable loyalties. Under Commonwealth, indeed under the social, economic, cultural, political policies which let to Commonwealth and which have kept Commonwealth going, the Puerto Rican community has progressed dramatically, improving all its indexes of well being, health, education, productivity, income at a pace comparable only to that of Israel, Japan, Italy. But material progress is not by itself a final answer.

What is Commonwealth? Does it provide a permanent, political structure of relationships, one which with some modifications may be fully satisfactory to Puerto Ricans, to the United States, one embodying "a decent regard for the opinion

of mankind?" Should it and will it last? Are there other Commonwealth situations in fact, if not in name, elsewhere? If so, how do they resemble and how do they differ from the Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico to use the Spanish denomination approved by the Puerto Rican Constitutional Convention of 1952?

Concerning "the opinion of mankind" it should be indicated that at its 1953 session, the General Assembly of the United Nations exempted the United States from reporting on the educational, social and economic conditions of Puerto Rico as required by Act 73 of the Charter of "all members having a responsibility for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government". This adjudication did not end the debate concerning the legitimacy or adequacy of Commonwealth in Puerto Rico or in the United Nations. Is such a debate a permanent and necessary feature of Commonwealth?

Eleven years later and at the initiative of the Puerto Rican Legislature, the Congress, the President of the United States, the Legislature and the Governor of Puerto Rico, participated in setting up a U. S. P. R. Commission to study and to make recommendations concerning the political status of Puerto Rico. The Commission's Report deplored the subsistence of a 65 years old debate, found Commonwealth a political solution of equal dignity with Statehood or Independence, and recommended a plebiscite to determine future orientation status-wise.

The plebiscite held on July 23rd., 1967 favored continuation and improvement of Commonwealth. While the plebiscite strengthened the political legitimacy of Commonwealth it did not end or diminish the status debate.

EXISTING STUDIES ON COMMONWEALTH.-

Existing studies on Commonwealth deal exclusively or primarily with its achievements and failings within the local scene. They have examined its merits and demerits, its "unique" nor "queer" character within the pattern of American Constitutional Law; its colonial, neo-colonial or post-colonial nature, all of it in the light of traditional definitions of sovereignty, national state, federal unions. The Estado Libre Asociado is dismissed frequently as an isolated, temporarily departure from established norms, perhaps an expeditious way-station on the road towards Statehood or towards Independence.

This project would explore the correlations, similarities and differences of Commonwealth with political, economic and cultural developments and trends elsewhere where a similar language, religions, cultural, ethnic, developmental problems prevails.

The project aims to study the Puerto Rican experience as an imperfect, pragmatic, evolving but none-the-less firm and lasting middleway; one which will probably remain for the future as it is for the present, essential to the welfare, liberty,

progress, cultural and political autonomy as well as to the stability of Puerto Rico. It is assumed that once the range of vision is projected beyond the United States and Puerto Rico, Commonwealth is neither "unique" nor "queer". Then Commonwealth becomes an outstanding contribution to one of the most difficult and tense issues facing many other communities throughout the world: the issue of survival despite deep and meaningful differences within itself and beyond its boundaries. The goals are to achieve the highest degree of freedom and of self-realization; to avoid isolation and absorption; to maintain a basic equilibrium within itself, a loyal and fruitful cooperation within a wider political unit and a satisfactory and free interrelation with other communities. Are these goals achievable? Does Commonwealth facilitate their achievement in Puerto Rico? Elsewhere?

A brief outline of the project itself is attached.