

August 19, 1951

Letters to The Star . . .

Puerto Rico's Position

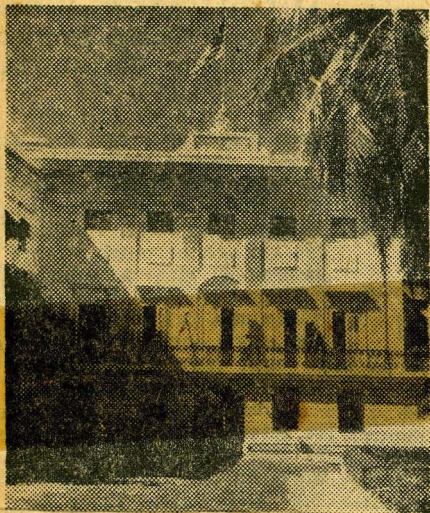
Edward Tomlinson seems to misinterpret Puerto Rico's political picture in his article, "Puerto Rico on the Threshold," in The Sunday Star of August 5.

Under Public Law 600, 81st Congress, accepted by the people of Puerto Rico in a popular referendum in June, Puerto Rico is organizing a constitutional government. But also, within Public Law 600, the Puerto Rico Statute of Federal Relations, a compact between the island's people and the United States, continues in effect.

United States citizenship as extended to Puerto Ricans in 1917 and Puerto Rican citizenship as extended to United States citizens with one year's residence in the island continues. The privileges and immunities clause of the Constitution extends to Puerto Rico. Except for internal revenue laws, Federal laws extend automatically to Puerto Rico unless locally inapplicable. Foreign imports are subject to the same tariff rates as in the continent. The authority of the Puerto Rican Legislature is limited to purely local matters. The government of Puerto Rico is locally financed. A Federal District Court sits in Puerto Rico as in any State. Federal immigration laws apply to Puerto Rico. Some joint Federal and insular programs, where expenses are shared by both governments, operate in Puerto Rico (grant-in-aid laws).

Accordingly, Mr. Tomlinson is in error when he says that:

- (1) The island is not self-supporting;
- (2) political ties with the mainland are hardly perceptible;
- (3) the island makes its own laws (the island does not participate in Federal legislation which applies to Puerto Rico);
- (4) every official



Governor's Palace, San Juan
Allegiance to same flag

is elected (Federal officials are appointed—insular officials are elected; (5) appeals from Puerto Rico's supreme court are seldom taken. (The situation is no different than appeals from a State supreme court, except that in the latter case appeals go directly to the Federal Supreme Court, whereas in the former appeals go to the First Circuit Court.)

With its new constitutional government, Puerto Rico will occupy a position similar to that of a State, except:

1. A statute of Federal relations, bilaterally adopted, will join the island to the United States instead of that union being effected by the Federal Constitution. This union with the Federal Government will be parallel to that of a State.

2. Although Federal laws apply generally to Puerto Rico as to a State, Puerto Rico will have no voice in the election of Federal lawmakers or the Chief Executive; and

3. Thus Puerto Rico will not be subject to Federal internal revenue taxes, except on Federal salaries and income derived from sources outside the island.

The ties between Puerto Rico and the United States are no more tenuous than the ties among the States are tenuous. If anything, Public Law 600 strengthens Puerto Rico's union with the United States while granting full self-government along State lines to a people capable of handling this trust.

English is compulsory in Puerto Rico from the first grade. At university level classes are in English or Spanish, depending upon the professor's choice. College students are bilingual upon entering the university.

Ended now in Puerto Rico is Federal interference in purely local matters. Congress has discarded this suggestion of colonialism.

Full democracy is offered to Puerto Rico. Whenever it is thus offered it strengthens the union of free peoples owing allegiance to the same flag. Union based on equality is tenfold stronger than union based on subordination.

A. Fernos-Isern,
Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico.