

## Puerto Rico Hails Her Gains In First 2 Years of Freedom

### Dr. Fernos-Isern Reports Higher Standard of Living

"The people of Puerto Rico now have a feeling of permanence and solidity after being afflicted for many years by uncertainty over their political status and their future."

That is the way Dr. Antonio Fernos-Isern, Puerto Rico's resident commissioner in Washington appraises the effect of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico just two years ago today.

A companion effect, Dr. Fernos-Isern reports, is a "step-up in the rhythm" of improvements in the economy, education and general well-being of the people of Puerto Rico.

#### Have Own Constitution.

Commonwealth status gave Puerto Ricans a constitution of their own and practically all the rights and powers of a state except voting privileges in Congress. Before the Commonwealth, the island had a large measure of self-government, but it was based on an act of Congress, not on their own constitution. Dr. Fernos-Isern, interviewed in his Capitol Hill office, put it this way:

"The Commonwealth has satisfied the natural desire of the people of Puerto Rico to have a status that cannot be classified as colonial. Before, they felt that they were just recipients of a government conferred by Washington. Now they have a body politic of their own and their relationships with the United States are governed by a compact."

Dr. Fernos-Isern, an M. D. with freckles and a friendly grin, originated the Commonwealth idea in 1946 when he decided that neither independence nor statehood, both of which had many advocates, were practical goals. His idea was embraced by Luis Munoz Marin, the popular governor of the island, and in 1951 Dr. Fernos-Isern presided over a constitutional convention. Congress ratified the new constitution on July 3, 1953, and the commonwealth came into being on July 25.

#### Higher Standard of Living.

The Commissioner reported that "Puerto Rico now has a standard of living equal to that of any Latin American country except Argentina and Venezuela." By offering tax concessions and other measures in "Operation Bootstrap," he said, it has attracted textile, plastic, glass, ceramic, drug and other industries. Also there have been step-ups in such traditional industries as sugar, coffee, cigar-making and rum distilling. The tourist trade is growing, too.

In regard to education, Dr. Fernos-Isern proudly noted:

"At the turn of the century, we had 80 per cent illiteracy. Now we have 80 per cent literacy. And this was achieved while introducing English in all the schools, from first grade on, so that now Puerto Rico is truly bilingual."

The doctor said that about two-thirds of Puerto Rico's voters support the party which sponsored the Commonwealth. The others are split between in-



Dr. Antonio Fernos-Isern.  
DR. ANTONIO FERNOS-ISERN.

dependence and statehood groups, with a sizable edge for the former.

#### Criticizes Nationalists.

Fanatical nationalists of the type who made the Blair House attempt on President Truman's life in 1950 and shot up the House of Representatives chamber this year number no more than 500, Dr. Fernos-Isern said.

"These people," he declared "have lost contact with reality. They refuse to see what is before their eyes. They talk as if Puerto Rico were a colony in the worst sense of the word. That's not so. They are not fighting the United States Government, but a Puerto Rican government and they are going counter to the wishes of the people."

Dr. Fernos-Isern feels that Puerto Rican progress is of great importance to the United States. He explained:

"We are a sort of show window, demonstrating to other Spanish-American countries the benefits that can come from relationships with the United States. Representatives of many Spanish-American nations come to Puerto Rico to see what technological assistance from the United States has done for us."

There will be parades and speeches in Puerto Rico today, but Dr. Fernos-Isern will not be there because Congress is still in session. Instead, he'll honor the occasion with a speech in the House of Representatives, where he has all the privileges of membership except the right to vote on legislation.