Trouble in Paradise

NOW we've got trouble in paradise. Meaning Puerto Rico, my favorite island.

Here the tropical breezes shake coconuts down on the heads of the unwise, the saloon keepers whisk up concoctions of rum and pineapple, and a poet turned governor is trying to bring on an economic revolution with a trick scheme to exempt corporations in new businesses from income taxes.

The idea looked like it was working fine, too, with the dozens of mainland firms opening branch factories in the beautiful isle, when blooie! Comes the old-fashioned kind of revolution.

A weird one, too. This island is a part of the United States and the revolutionists claim they want independence. So it's a sort of civil war on a miniature scale with tropic overtones. And poor old Gov. Munoz Marin isn't spending tonight dancing, I betcha.

At this writing the National Guard has been called out, the fighting is fierce in widely scattered points and the revolutionists even have attacked La Fortaleza, the governor's palace.

I remember spending a fantastic night there during his inauguration. There was fighting then, too, but mostly between ladies in evening gowns struggling forward in an effort to shake the oversize paw of the 225-pound governor.

The party went on all night. Gov. Marin was getting a little red around the eyes by 5 a.m., but he was having so much fun that he stayed on for a couple of hours more. After all, it was his big evening. He was the first elected governor Puerto Rico ever had and it looked like all the people were behind him. Literally. The lines of well-wishers queued up for blocks.

So the governor, who was educated in Washington and who is perhaps as well known here as he is in San Juan, immediately began his program of luring industry there to make jobs for his hordes of jobless citizens.

ONE of the first of the industrialists to take him up on a 10-year tax-free deal was Ed Gardner, the Archie's Tavern radio spleler, who took his beer program to San Juan and who started production there a few days ago of a feature-length movie.

Numerous other mainlanders opened factories in Puerto Rico, making blankets, calicos, gloves, shirtwaists, cement and bricks. Only this week a leading optical concern in Ohio announced the building of a plant there to make precision instruments for the defense program.

So things were looking elegant. A couple of days ago my bride flew down for a loll on some of the governor's beaches and she wrote me that the new hotel he built, the Palacio Hilton, was one of the most magnificent she ever saw. Only trouble, she said, was its lack of customers.

The day she arrived 150 convicts blasted their way out of prison and I was just as well pleased when Mrs. O. reported she was on the way to the Dominican Republic.

I can only hope the governor quells his revolution without killing too many of his people. He's a good Joe, he has a nice island, and the Puerto Ricans at long last seem to be getting somewhere—if they'll only quit turning machine guns on each other.