CHAPTER V

PROMOTING BETTER UNDERSTANDING:
The Role of the Commonwealth's Department of State

We live in a very complex world, united more than ever by technology and economy and by modern means of communication. For the first time, history has a really universal character, and its fundamental routes do not proceed from an exclusive region on the globe. New states—embodying the new aspirations of peoples with ancient pasts—have begun to act in the international scene, guided sometimes by the doctrines of extreme nationalism and others by the aspiration to revindicate rights which were preterred for a long time. Those that were once marginal peoples—peoples enslaved and dominated by the great occidental world powers—afirm now their right to participate actively in history, to improve their living conditions, and to use, in all possible ways, the growing advantages of modern technology.

There is a vertical upheaval of peoples in contemporary history, peoples who hastily want to renovate their destiny, and who hold
within their frontiers, millions and millions of inhabitants willing to accomplish a drastic change in their living conditions. This fact is at least as dramatic as the ideological conflict between Communism and the West. It is an event that will certainly have more profound effects in the future of the world than the ideological conflict in which we are entangled. The solution to this conflict will depend—in great measure—on the route chosen by the new states. To break through the menaces of war that have today a tremendous destructive force against civilization it is necessary that each people, each community, each citizen begins to transcend the nationalist barriers, the linguistic and cultural barriers and the collective myths, and that each of us realizes a formidable effort of understanding, uniting men of lands and cultures different from ours. The task of international organizations in our time consists of breaking through to that new stage in history, of creating solidarities that go beyond political demarcations and known cultural zones, a solidarity of all men. Within this contemporary situation is that we in Puerto Rico have begun to develop
a series of programs, efforts towards international understanding. Since these efforts are essentially a task of our Department of State—which is in itself a new institution within our system of government—it is useful to know what we are, and what we do in that Department.

Within the Department of State the People of Puerto Rico have developed a series of programs of international approachment, programs that reflect our people's own personality, that are rooted in Puerto Rican realities and that have begun to awaken the interest of peoples of good will in various continents. These programs obey fundamental decisions of our Governor, like when in 1949 he addressed himself to President Harry S. Truman—after he had announced his now famous Point IV doctrine—and suggested for Puerto Rico to be used as a technological observation and training center. In this manner a program was initiated which has brought to the island near 5,500 persons of 112 countries. We also owe our programs to the clear and categoric mandate of the Legislative Assembly of the Commonwealth. In Law 119, approved on July 1, 1953, the legislative
will was thus expressed: Section 2: The Department of State of
the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is hereby empowered to carry out
programs for the promotion of closer relations between Puerto Rico
and other countries, relations based on a true understanding of
the actual facts regarding our politics, economics, society, and
culture, or any other facts useful to the purpose of this Act.

"Let our truth be known outside of Puerto Rico": that is the
spirit of this legislation, which we might very well consignate
as the slogan of our State Department.

Putting into effect the indications and instructions of the
Executive and Legislative powers we have developed a vast program
that intends to incorporate Puerto Rico to the strong currents of
exchange of ideas, experiences and techniques of other peoples; a
program that intends to closely cooperate with the United States
in the basic aspects of its foreign policy, and that not only
promotes knowledge of what our island is and does, but also promotes
our learning from the experience, ideals and efforts of other peoples
that like ours, are seeking for a higher place in civilization.
Let us state as a sample, part of the job already done. The Technical Cooperation Program, popularly known as Point IV Program, is already a complex operation in Puerto Rico. In it we not only use the facilities of all government agencies—including educational ones—but those private efforts of cooperation provided by civic organizations, and others. The emphasis within this Program is in the exchange of technological knowledge, in the exchange of new means and ways to solve old and persistent problems in the fields of education, health, housing, agriculture, industry, and others.

We never think of our island as a model, since we recognize that we have a lot to improve and to learn. Friends from other lands that visit us, by giving us their criticism and observations are a very efficient way to surpass our deficiencies in applying technology to the problems of our people. Many of these friends are not just students that enter our classrooms; they are professionals, men of government like us, many of them more experienced, with more busy lives than ours. Their presence in Puerto Rico does not only
obey to the technical cooperation programs of the United States, but also, to the ones undertaken by international organisms or individual governments in and out of America.

There is also the cultural and Educational Exchange Program which has brought 1,000 visitors from more than 64 countries to Puerto Rico. This program has sponsored various meetings and conferences which have attracted interest of many people within and outside of Puerto Rico; the latest ones: the Inter-American Exchange of Persons Conference and the Conference of Cultural Attache’s and Information Officers of the United States in Latin America, in which were also present the representatives of Bi-National Commissions of the Fulbright Program for seven Latin American countries. The word "exchange" which we have been using in memorandums and documents has acquired with these meetings a dramatic meaning. Prominent figures in the governments, universities, foundations and institutes have made evident to us that exchange means spiritual communication from culture to culture, from man to man; that it is a process of interpretation of ideals, of creation of solidarities, without which
our world would asphyxiate within the walls of its nationalistic
dreads, suspicions and prejudices. The program we sponsor functions
in coordination with not only the Department of State of the United
States, but also with a multiplicity of private organisms and
public institutions that promote a fruitful current of personal
relations, intellectual contacts and exchange of common preoccupations
and ideas. We do not only want to promote technological training.
We are not seeking to study this or that technological solution
to this or that problem. We are seeking to pierce into the knowledge
of cultures, to capture the living essence that defines collective
personalities; a much more subtle job, but one of more deep and
urgent importance in our times.

We must denote also here, as another fundamental program of
ours, the conferences, seminars, meetings and workshops program,
which has brought to the island more than 1,500 persons in the last
four years. We have linked our programs to the projects of inter-
national organisms like the organization of American States, the
Panamerican Institute of Geography and History, the Panamerican
Sanitary Office. We have also cooperated with Inter-American professional associations like the Panamerican Otorrinolaringology and Broncoesofagology Association, the International Institute of Hispanic-American Literature, and the Inter-American Association of Psychology. By offering means and facilities so that all these institutions can meet in Puerto Rico, we have made possible that all their worries and efforts be made ours, and have transformed the island in a meeting place for dialogues and debates on themes of vital interest for the peoples of this Hemisphere. We have dialogued in Puerto Rico with people from government, professionals, men of letters, men of science, sociologists, economists and geographers; on themes like the teaching of history in America, the course of ideas in the Hemisphere, the basic problems of health, the burning theme of education, and in particular, on the false images, the myths and deformations that confound understanding between the peoples of the New World.

For that reason we have been called by one of the foremost Latin American writers, the Ecuatorian Benjamin Carrión, "meeting place of the Americas." We believe that it is fundamentally necessary
that educational institutions, institutes, foundations and civic entities promote these exchanges. But we also affirm that it is a fundamental responsibility of any democratic government in America to contribute with its resources, its experiences and its knowledge of its own realities to these currents of understanding, comprehension and harmony. Since the First World War it has become evident that in this new world that is being formed, cultural cooperation cannot go without support from democratic governments. From the experience of intellectual cooperation within the League of Nations to the task of organisms dedicated to promote science, education and culture, like UNESCO, a deeply felt necessity has been present for official help to come and strengthen the cause of culture, if never to direct it. One of the efforts that constitute the highest pride to the United States is its program of cultural relations initiated in the Buenos Aires Conference of 1936, and which already has four lustrums of useful life. Even if the economic investment of the Federal Government in this effort has been very
limited if compared with military and economic help, Congress and the Executive have begun to understand that the program of cultural relations is of vital significance to the understanding of the real aspirations and ideals of the people of the United States. Andrew H. Berding, Auxiliary Secretary of State has said with great sincerity in Puerto Rico that the United States experiments great difficulties in achieving a real understanding of its authentic style of life, its traditions, and its democratic ideals. Not with gold or weapons shall they be understood, but with fine cultural comprehension, with the living person to person relation. To help in that task we are willing and ready, as a Government and as a people.