

GOVERNORS ON PARADE

By Roberto H. Todd

- I -

During the last forty years in which Puerto Rico has been under the sovereignty of the United States, fifteen governors have been sent to us by eight different Presidents namely: Mac Kinley, Theo. Toosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover and F.D. Roosevelt. During the military government, which lasted from October 18, 1898, to April 30, 1900, three of these governors were Major Generals, to wit : Brooke, Henry and Davis. Not counting the last two incumbents in said office, appointed by the leader of the "New Deal", with whom I have spoken only once, - I have been personally acquainted with the other thirteen, many of them very intimately, and due to those circumstances I am able to state, that with very few exceptions, the Island might have done better if she had been allowed to select her Governors from a list of over six dozen distinguished Puerto Ricans, educated in colleges in the United States, well known and beloved by the whole country, who would have discharged the duties of the office with more intelligence and a better understanding of our problems. Eloquent proof of this statement was given Mr. Messrs. Travieso, Padin, Benedicto, Huyke, Domenech and Menéndez Ramos, all Puerto Ricans, when they occupied at interim the governorship on account of the absence of the incumbents. There was never the slightest complaint against these Puerto Ricans in the exercise of their official duties, not even by their political oponents. On the contrary, their behaviour was always within a prudent discretion.

The ambition of all Puerto Ricans, without regard to differences in politics, is that we may be able, some day, to elect our own governors from among our people, until such a time when we may acquire more liberal concessions

II

from Washington in the line of self-government. This ambition, it must be conceded, is a noble one, This Island has a perfect right to be governed by her own people, under the guidance and protection of the United States, and by a clearly defined form of government agreed upon by both sides, which should be pleasant and beneficial to both the United States and Puerto Rico. Our country will never be contented with the present form of government. We despise the word possession which has been assigned to our Island for what it really means. After being a province in the Spanish days, the same as all the provinces in Spain, we cannot be contented with the present name given us. We honestly believe that a conference of leaders of the different political opinions in Puerto Rico, and two or three leaders of the Administrations at Washington, could bring about the agreement upon a form of government suitable to the Island.

After being under the folds of "Old Glory" for the last forty years, our people, who are citizens of the United States, are unable to discover what our future status will be and we believe that we have a right to know what the future has in store for us as a country. This right is being claimed by every Puerto Rican, no matter what his political creed may be. On the other hand, both statesmen and politicians at Washington during these forty years, have refused to commit themselves as to the future of this little Island, without giving any convincing reason for such an action; but they insist, never-the-less, that our people should be loyal and keep the peace. This can be expected only of those of us who are intelligent enough to be patient and sufficiently patriotic to wait for better days that are bound to come; but it is too much to be asked from those less enlightened and impatient in the light of the procrastination of the authorities in Washington, Whenever complaints of this nature have reached the national capital, the well known generosity of the United States towards Puerto Rico is thrown in our face. No. Generosity as to financial matters, is

III.

one thing and disregard for our political future is another; and generosity in money matters will never buy our right to demand that our political future be solved. And solved it will. But let us leave out the financial side of this problem as it do^e not fit in. We repeat that the whole country of this little Island recognize that our prosperity has depended in the past and will depend in the future on the generous behaviour of the Administration at Washington. What we fail to understand is that a National party and its distinguished leader who have coined the phrases "new deal" and "good neighbor" should neglect the easy task of solving the Puerto Rican problem, following the policy of the Republican Party who never tried to declare us citizens. A contented Puerto Rico would mean more to Latin-America, than all the goodwill visits that might be made to the countries of the South.

During these long forty years of patient and watchful waiting, it has never occurred to any of the Presidents who occupied the White House, that a Puerto Rican might safely discharge the duties of Governor, in-as-much as there is nothing in our organic law to hinder such an action. The organic acts of the different Territories invariable contained the provision that governors should be appointed from among residents of the Territories. Our organic act is silent as to this provision, but, we repeat, we have never been favored with a similar decision from any President. They always had a friend to please, ignoring the fact that Puerto Rico is something different from the rest of North America.

The revision of documents taken from our private files, some of them having turned yellow from the number of years in our possession, place us in a position to state, that from among the governors sent from the North, there have been many who were men of recognized ability, well balanced in their way of thinking, industrious and well disposed on all occasions to consider the welfare of both the United States and of Puerto Rico, in their dealing with public matters, thus reflecting honor on the office for which

IV

they were appointed. Puerto Rico will always cherish in the memory of those desinterested men who tried hard at the commencement of our civil government to teach us the intricacies of self-government as well as those who after years, worked hand in hand with us for the welfare of the Island. God bless them. But it is also our duty to state that there have been governors totally incapable, by their lack of mentality, education and understanding to govern a country like ours of a million and a half inhabitants of race, language, customs, religion and traditions entirely different from the countries of North America.

We have had the good fortune to be governed by gentlemen who in their own country had been Congressmen, state legislators, Assistant Secretaries, judges, bankers, a retired general of the Army, businessmen, school-teachers, a couple of brokers and others who had no specialty whatever; and among them we have had also the unpleasant fate to suffer the whims and fancies of men of strange mentalities. One of them had such a lack of culture as to receive visitors while he himself remained in his seat with his feet on the desk and busily reading a newspaper. Of this lack of culture, the writer was the victim the only time he visited the said governor.

We have also had the unpleasantness of having governors with such a lack of personal self-respect, that some of them have presented themselves at public gatherings entirely drunk, and one of them, while visiting Washington, had to be ejected from the White House when the President and his wife were entertaining some distinguished guests. Our governor, in a pitiful state of inebriety forced himself into the blue room where a concert was taking place and took a seat besides Chief Justice Fuller, of the Supreme Court, and insisted in talking aloud, patting the Chief Justice on the back; but when the antics of our alcoholic governor became unbearable, a certain Cabinet Member big and strong as a bull, got hold of the disturber by grabbing him by the collar of his coat and carrying him to the first door entrance and

ejecting him ordering the attendants not to let him in again. This disgraceful incident came to our notice when a friend mailed me a copy of a newspaper from Washington in which the well known newspaper man, J. Hamilton Lewis, of late a U.S. Senator for Missouri, had written up the happening under the heading: JAG AT THE WHITE HOUSE. Without mentioning any name, he referred to the offender as "one of our Colonial governors." I still keep the article in my files. And let me say in passing, that the offending governor was allowed to come back to his post and went out of office when the President who appointed him left the White House.

Another of our governors, under the excuse that he was contemplating a trip North, appointed his private Secretary and two other employees of his government, as a committee to visit certain sugar men belonging to the Republican Party in quest of contributions with which to defray his traveling expenses. The matter came to my notice thru the visit of one of the men visited and who was asked to contribute with the sum of five thousand dollars. His answer was that he would consult with his friends, and I advised him not to contribute with any amount whatever. When I confronted the governor with this action of his, he plead ignorance of the existance of such a Commission and his Secretary, whom I called to explain in the presence of the governor, said that the governor knew nothing of it. Of course, I did not believe him.

This same governor who had occasion to get hold of a sheet of paper with my letter-head as Republican National Committeeman for Puerto Rico, wrote to the Editor of a well known Magazine, who had criticised his administration, defending himself and his actions and signing the letter with my name, as such National Committeeman. While in Washington a friend called my attention to an article published by the said magazine answering a letter which he had received from me. I got hold of a copy of the publication, and had to confess that if I had written such a letter, the Editor was right in what

VI

he published. I had made an ass of myself. I requested the Editor of the Magazine to let me have a photostatic copy of my ^{letter,} ~~copy~~, and when I received it, I had the proof in my hands that my signature had been forged by the governor of Puerto Rico. I wrote him and accused him of his disgraceful act, and I personally presented the matter to the Secretary of War, under whose care Puerto Rico was at the time; and he told me the very next day that he had placed the subject before the President. I am still wondering if the offending governor ever received a reprimand for this forgery.

Here the reader will probably ask how these men could have received the appointment as Governors of our Island. We have been for many years asking the same question and the answer is, at times, the desire of pleasing a friend in whose judgement the President had confidence! At other times, it was a political debt that had to be paid, and not finding a proper place for him in Washington, the misfit was shipped to Puerto Rico, that little possession of ours. That is the only way of explaining the appointments of certain men who could not hold a fifteen minutes conversation with anyone without showing their lack of the necessary conditions for governing others.

-----O-----

In the history of Puerto Rico from the days when Columbus discovered the Island, there is no doubt that the most interesting period is contained in the happenings in the last forty years, after the change of sovereignty. Those of us who had the opportunity of living in this blessed little country of ours during that time, never again shall be witnesses to similar happenings as those that occurred in that course of time, and we doubt very much that such an opportunity shall repeat itself. Here, in this narrow piece of land, as a result of the war of 1898, two different races found themselves face to face, the Anglonmerican and the Spanish-American, the first named, strong, young and healthy; the other one, old, diseased, broken-down. Every indication was that in the struggle between the two, the former would come out victorious,

VII

and during the first years things went that way. The differences were of language, religion and traditions. At the end of the struggle, the weakest of the two races have come out on top in that hard struggle of more than a third of a century, with its language, religion and traditions intact.

The Spanish spoken today in Puerto Rico and which will continue to be the vernacular language, is purer today than the one which we spoke when we were under the Spanish flag. The reason is that Puerto Ricans have put all their efforts in keeping their mother tongue intact and to speak it better every day. As regards ~~her~~ religion, today the Roman Catholic one, which is the religion of the ~~majority~~ majority of the Island, depends entirely on the generosity of the Catholic Puerto Rican people. Regarding the old tradition of Puerto Rico, the people retain and revere them, although it has acquired some of the new sovereignty.

I repeat the fact that those of us who were fortunate enough to live in Puerto Rico during the last forty years and to occupy distinguished positions that gave us the opportunity of seeing and observing and helping in the political game of those days, are in duty bound not to leave this life without writing up our experiences during that interesting period.

This has been the principle reason of my undertaking this work. I have at times, been the principle witness of many happenings in the company of other men who have already gone beyond and I have the painful impression, wherever I look around, to see that I am remaining alone, as the only witness of matters which I am now recalling. I believe therefore, that I am doing my duty in writing these experiences of mine-

! NOW FOR THE PARADE !

7/4