

Whither Puerto Rico?

Little noticed by the public the other day was the action of the United Nations General Assembly in adopting a resolution that referred to the present "new constitutional status" of Puerto Rico—in effect, an associated commonwealth in relation to the United States. But of eminent satisfaction to the U.S. should be the tone of praise extended to Americans by the UN in viewing the transition of Puerto Rico from dependency to self-government as the ideal.

The resolution came close to failing simply because many colonial powers voted against it or abstained from voting due to their rejection of a clause appended to the resolution noting that the UN should have the responsibility for determining when the transition should be made from colony to self-government. Because many colonial powers hold that this matter is to be determined solely by them—perhaps in negotiation with the colony—this idea was not popular.

Yet, as numerous actions and debates of the UN from the beginning have shown, relations of colonies and colonial powers have long been discussed, considered, and voted on by the General Assembly. That applies to Syria and Lebanon, Iran, Indonesia, the Italian colonies and other non-self-governing areas. Under the system of trusteeship still others have been made the UN's direct responsibility.

The U.S., through Ambassador Lodge, has once more reaffirmed its support of full independence for Puerto Rico if the government there should ask for it. Puerto Rico's first elected governor, the capable Luis Numoz Marin, hailed this reassurance as "a magnificent attitude which does honor to the United States and will show America and the whole world the sincerity of the present relationship of voluntary association between the United States and Puerto Rico." Yet, as the governor has observed, separate independence for Puerto Rico would mean nothing more than the independence of the graveyard, because Puerto Rico could not economically exist without close association with the U.S.