

# Puerto Rico's Political Development



*The Puerto Rican flag*

After the end of military occupation (1900) Puerto Rico was governed as a protectorate state of the United States. An American governor ruled with the assistance of an 11 member Executive Council. Six of them were Americans. The other five were appointed by the President of the United States. That meant that the Americans were still in control of Puerto Rico. They began to feel like Cuba. They had switched one master for another.

In 1916, the Second Organic Act or the Jones Act was passed. Puerto Rico was declared to be an official territory of the U.S. The governor was still an American. The U.S. still appointed the top ranking positions in the army, judicial system and government. The U.S. reserved the right to disallow any law that was passed by the Puerto Rican Legislature. The Puerto Ricans were now citizens of the U.S. they were granted the franchise although they could not vote in U.S. Federal Elections.

By the 1940's, a number of nationalists, radical elements and other groups became quite dissatisfied with U.S. rule. There were riots and unrest which led to the death of at least one U.S. police chief. The American government sprang into action and appointed the first native governor.

In 1952, the Puerto Ricans achieved Commonwealth Status. She became an Associated Free state. President Munoz Marin asked that the boundaries of this new relationship with the U.S. be clearly defined. The U.S. government obliged him.

## **Commonwealth Status**

1. Puerto Rico to be governed according to the 1952 Constitution

2. She is committed to a democratic system of government which recognizes that power is invested in the leaders by the people and must be exercised in accordance with their will.
3. There are three branches of government: The Legislative, the Executive and the Judiciary.
4. The Legislative Assembly shall have two houses: The Senate and the House of Representatives whose members are duly elected by direct vote at each election.
5. Executive power is to be invested in the governor who is also chosen by the electoral process.
6. The Supreme Court is charged with the responsibility of dispensing justice. Other courts may be established by following due legal procedures.
7. She pledges loyalty to the principles of the Federal Constitution
8. All men are equal before the law regardless of race, color, sex, religion or birth.

#### **Why did some Puerto Ricans support this new arrangement?**

1. It ensured political stability
2. It was a democratic form of government which sought to protect the rights of the common man
3. Puerto Ricans still had U.S. citizenship
4. They could travel to and work freely in the U.S.
5. American investment for the development of the economy was ensured
6. Puerto Rican goods would enter the U.S. without paying duties
7. They did not have to pay Federal taxes
8. They expected U.S. help, grants and funding for infrastructural projects.
9. The new constitution guaranteed the right to public education
10. Those persons who did not support independence felt that this was much better than colonialism.

### **Why did some Puerto Ricans oppose this new arrangement?**

- 1.** They did not like this half state between complete political independence and colonialism
- 2.** The new constitution still gave the U.S. ultimate control over Puerto Rico. They had the last word.
- 3.** Their rulers were mere puppets. In practice, they had very little power
- 4.** The constant exchange with the U.S. would lead to a rejection if not destruction of the Puerto Rican culture and the adaptation of the U.S. culture
- 5.** The Constitution was largely influenced by and patterned off the U.S. Constitution
- 6.** Puerto Ricans could be drafted into the U.S. army but they were not guaranteed the same privileges as Americans.
- 7.** Development was centered on the towns and tourist areas. The majority of the people lived in squalid conditions. 'democracy and individual rights' had not reached them.