

Inaugural Address of the Governor of Puerto Rico
The Honorable Jesús T. Piñero

September 3, 1946

The act of justice conferred on Puerto Rico by President Truman's democratic action has prompted my friends and fellow countrymen to tender me cordial demonstrations of their loyalty and support. It is difficult for me, a farmer all my life, to find words adequate enough to express my heartfelt gratitude for their tribute, and, particularly, for the warm welcome they have accorded me today.

I am fully aware of the great honor and responsibility bestowed upon me by the President of the United States when he designated me Governor of the Island. In accepting this honor and responsibility, which for the first time falls to a Puerto Rican, I promise you that I shall devote all my energies and resources to proving myself worthy of the trust which has been reposed in me. I have repeatedly affirmed – and reaffirm now – that I shall need the cooperation and assistance of all Puerto Ricans and all friends of Puerto Rico. This administration must be such as to substantiate once more the words of that great friend of Puerto Rico, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when he declared that we Puerto Ricans had achieved political maturity and were capable of solving our own problems and facing our own destiny.

At the last general election my people chose me to be their Resident Commissioner in Washington, so that, from the Nation's capital, I might further the program of government which they, as a free electorate, had espoused at the polls.

During my term in Washington I did everything I did everything in my power to fulfill the mandate which had been given me, and scrupulously sought to represent all Puerto Ricans, regardless of color, class or creed.

As Governor of Puerto Rico, I shall have the honor of representing the Chief Executive and of supporting and defending the Constitution and national security of the United States. In appointing me to the Governorship, President Truman has added to my existing duty to the people of Puerto Rico that of expressing his manifest desire that our Island be governed democratically and with a maximum of respect for the will of the people, expressed in accordance with principles consecrated by law. That, obviously, has been the intent of the President, and that is what gives his action such great democratic worth.

During the final days of a long and exhausting session, during which pressing national problems still awaited solutions, the Senate of the United States likewise gave its unanimous approval to the democratic action of the President. Throughout the nation the press received the news of my appointment with warmth and enthusiasm, not because I happened to be designated, but because of the profound feeling of democracy which the appointment symbolized. I can safely say that the American people as a whole reacted to the selection of a Puerto Rican as Governor of the Island with manifest approval and

satisfaction. This attitude of the American people gives renewed meaning to our hope that the promise of the Atlantic Charter respecting the right of all peoples to determine the form of government under which they will live will be fulfilled here in every sense of the word.

I deem it opportune, on this occasion, to clarify one point: The appointment of a Puerto Rican to the Governorship of Puerto Rico in itself does not fulfill the aspirations of our people, nor does it fully comply with the provisions of the Atlantic Charter. It does, however, constitute an extremely significant step forward. It is fitting that we should here pay tribute to the indefatigable efforts of my distinguished predecessor, Dr. Rexford G. Tugwell, to evolve a final solution to the elusive problem of our political status, and bring about, in the interim, the appointment of a Puerto Rican as Governor. Dr. Tugwell wished to be the last governor to occupy that office by presidential appointment, or, at least, to be the last non-Puerto Rican governor of this Island. I pledge myself to make my own term of office as short as possible, and to strive to win for the Puerto Rican people the right to elect their own representative, as soon as feasible, at the polls. This objective of mine is shared by President Truman, who, on more than one occasion, has expressed a sincere desire to see our democratic aspirations fulfilled.

Nor must we forget the contribution which our island legislators have made, in Puerto Rico as well as in the United States, to solving the problem of our political status. The unanimous action of our Legislature and the efforts of the Permanent Committee on Puerto Rico's Political Status during its stay in Washington drew new supporters to our just claims. Let all credit for these gains be given to these distinguished countrymen of ours, and let it go in particular to those minority members who, disdaining party considerations, cooperated so closely with the majority in seeking a solution to our most urgent political problem.

The Congress terminated its deliberations three weeks ago. During the final days of the session, it enacted legislation aimed at reorganizing its structure and functioning. It is hoped that as a result all legislative processes will be more rapid and effective. One consequence of the reorganization will be the disappearance of the House Committee on Insular Affairs and the Senate Committee on Territories and Island Possessions. Puerto Rican affairs will be delegated to other Committees soon to be created. Perhaps we shall find old friends on these new Committees, but there will also be new members whom we shall have to initiate into the problems and aspirations of Puerto Rico. Hence, harmony and unity among ourselves will be even more essential than ever.

We are all aware of the magnitude of the difficulties which characterize our economic life, but our will and determination to face them are equally great. Their solution will depend largely upon our faith, solidarity and unwavering determination continually to improve the patterns and practices of our Government. At no time must we forget that we are an essentially poor people. Our mass poverty calls for the highest sense of responsibility in our public servants. Government does not exist to solve personal problems, but rather to confront and solve collective problems. The people derive no benefit whatsoever from a government of political cronies and personal

favorites. Public officials should be selected only on their ability to render, with maximum efficiency, services required by public necessity. Consequently, there can be no place in government for favoritism or cliques.

To this end, it behooves us constantly to expand and strengthen the salutary operations of our civil service, which guarantee us public officials who are incorruptible servants of the people, rather than of specific groups or factions.

I must emphatically insist that the Government refrain from penny-pinching for services or servants in its great task of bring justice and social welfare within the reach of all. But on the other hand, it must not expend a single cent unless the expenditure be completely justified. We are – and let us never forget it – a government of the poor and by the poor. We represent a people whose means of sustenance are of the scantiest; a people faced with difficult health problems and lacking adequate educational facilities. The task – already begun – of rescuing the people from their dire poverty calls for continuance, as effectively as possible, of our economic program, particularly where school, hospital and health-center construction are concerned. The housing program likewise merits preferential consideration. Vocational training which will be made available to all our veterans should be intensified to give us, at the earliest possible moment, a force of skilled artisans who can contribute to speeding our urgently needed industrialization.

Our best efforts will be necessary if we are to cope with the difficulties imposed by the pressure of our growing population on the extremely limited resources of the Island. Our future cannot be grounded in agriculture alone. To be sure, we must continually improve our methods of soil cultivation, so as to extract the maximum benefit from it. We must not falter in our determination to devise more efficient farming techniques and improve the quality of our production. But this in itself is insufficient.

Our dense population and limited territory drives us in the direction of rapid industrialization. We possess some raw materials, but seek elsewhere for others which we require. Not even the most powerful industrial nations find within their borders all the raw materials which they use. We do possess the most important factor in any industry—the strong arm of labor. The ability of our Puerto Rican workers is proverbial. But this ability can be made more utile only if we raise the health, social and educational standards of the worker and encourage him to develop a high sense of responsibility and pride in his profession.

Our Government has resolutely undertaken the great task of Puerto Rican industrialization. Its far-sighted effort calls for the cooperation of private enterprise. Many of our people already have begun to cooperate – with general public approval—in this program which is a program for all of us. Yet, even more is needed. The Government's mission is limited to experimentation with, and promotion of, new industries, particularly in the case of those industries which as yet have failed to attract private investors. In no sense does it aspire to become a disloyal competitor of these industries, nor does it attempt to hamper the spirit of free enterprise. We must offer even

greater incentives to private industry, and I avail myself of this opportunity to manifest publicly my desire to further this important aspect of our people's program.

The growth of our productive power should continue to go hand in hand with a fairer distribution of our wealth. Our social economy cannot permit a return to the injustices of the past. The formula which should govern our economic life is a simple one: produce with industry and good will, and distribute with justice and good faith. That is the course which will bear us to the solution to our economic problems.

Let us briefly examine what has been accomplished. To increase production, the Government has created such instrumentalities as the Industrial Development Company, the Development Bank, the Agricultural Development Company, the Water Resources Authority, and other agencies. With a view to a better distribution of our collective wealth, it has established the Land Authority, the Minimum Wage Board and other Government activities. It has revised tax rates so that the burden of taxation does not fall on those least able to pay, but on those best able to pay.

It has created the Transportation Authority and Communications Authority as a means of improving public services. It has established the General Supplies Administration to protect the public against rising prices. It has created a Housing Authority to attend to the pressing problems of shelter and slum clearance. It has expanded health and hospital services to protect and raise the standards of community health. It has awarded many scholarships for technical study, and has organized an efficient aqueduct service. It has accomplished all this in the face of wartime obstacles and difficulties arising from sharp increases in the prices of nearly all the materials, tools and machines required for this work.

Both the Planning Board and the Bureau of the Budget have made more feasible and effective our governmental task. I must also commend the entities such as the Insular Fire Service, the Labor Relations Board, the Recreation and Sports Commission, as well as other agencies for their meritorious work. I need not dwell upon the outstanding services rendered by the War Emergency Program. We have furnished the University of Puerto Rico additional funds with which to carry out a well-planned program of cultural rebirth, and perform new and vital social services to the people.

We have concerned ourselves with the problems of child welfare, which mean so much to the future of the Island. We have launched a noteworthy school-lunch program and have increased the number of schools, although this increase, unfortunately has failed to keep adequate pace with the number of children who seek admittance to our institutions of learning. I would not wish to end this summary of our accomplishments without mentioning the milk-station program which is so largely the achievement of Mrs. Grace F. Tugwell's humanitarian interest and outlook.

This, then, is what has been done. The basic pattern has my most unqualified approval, and for some time I have cooperated constantly in its development. Notwithstanding the good will of those who dedicated themselves to its fulfillment, and

notwithstanding the favorable balance now existing in our Insular Treasury, the task has not been an easy one. And difficult though it has been in the past, all that yet remains to be done and the uncertainty and doubt of our economic future will make it even more difficult and complex in the future. It is the duty of all Puerto Ricans to see to it that the program of the people is not frustrated. The Government of Puerto Rico has the right to ask the cooperation of all men and women of good will, whatever their social or economic background. We ask the aid of private enterprise, so that, through the creation of new sources of wealth, it may fulfill its role within our society and reap the benefits to which it is legitimately entitled. And we ask that the workers of Puerto Rico lend themselves, not only to supporting the structure and activities of their Government, but also in maintaining the high level of responsibility and excellence which the labor of each new day requires of every citizen.

The stability and progress of our economy cannot be predicated in low wages. Poverty can never be the foundation of prosperity. Prosperity exists only when it has succeeded in ameliorating poverty; when the wealth created by the productivity of all has been distributed among all in accordance with the most advanced tenets of social justice.

I wish here to make particular mention of our veterans of the two World Wars. Much what we have achieved and will achieve in the future is due to the loyal, noble and gallant contribution which our sons and daughters made to the struggle for democracy on the battlefields of the world. On many occasions I have heard enthusiastic comments on the manner in which our first draft quotas were filled by volunteers. Sixty thousand Puerto Ricans donned the uniform of their country during the recent war, and many of them gave their lives in the battle for freedom.

The American people have not forgotten the sacrifice which those men made, and the Congress of the United States has already enacted legislation which will benefit all our veterans. Puerto Rico owes a debt of gratitude to our valiant soldiers, and I can assure you that our Government will exercise constant vigilance to see to it that they are justly treated.

I would be wanting, were I to end this address today without specifically mentioning a problem which of late has assumed alarming proportions in our midst. I refer to profiteering and the black market.

Commerce is an activity which merits every incentive, as an indisputable factor in the life and prosperity of a people. But the businessman who takes advantage of periods of crisis and shortages to exploit unscrupulously the consumer is guilty of a crime against society.

I call upon those who still devote themselves to these reprehensible practices to subordinate their greed to the rights and welfare of the people. I am confident that the consumer will lend us his most decided cooperation in this campaign. The courageous manner in which our people and Government have faced this problem should be a source of pride and satisfaction for all of us. For my part, I warn those concerned that my

administration will proceed implacably against the guilty ones, and that there will be no truce until they have been brought to justice and duly punished for their crimes.

Today we have with us distinguished members of our Government, leading figures of our professional, political and business life, and people from the humblest walks of our society, assembled here regardless of political affiliation. Our rejoicing today goes beyond factional lines. We are united in our common love of country, and devotion to its progress, present and future. In the name of this love and devotion I call upon all of you to lend your fullest and most sincere cooperation to the critical and all-important task which I am today initiating in Puerto Rico.

We are politicians. Every function of Government is necessarily the work of politicians and political parties. But politics must not ever be a degrading and shameful calling. It is, on the contrary, the art which permits us to contribute proudly to the constant improvement of our country. The goal which Puerto Rico seeks is above party considerations. It must be, above all else, the labor of Puerto Rico's conscience, Puerto Rico's ability, and Puerto Rico's faith and hope. All of us must cooperate in this task, and to it I dedicate without reservation my daily toil and modest strength. We must carry out a basic mission which lies before us—that of solving our economic problems and determining, with the support of the President, the Congress and the people of the United States, our final political destiny.

Let the attitude of every man and woman in Puerto Rico respond to this ever vigilant conscience, this spirit of common solidarity and this lofty mission of democracy and justice!