

# EYES ON PUERTO RICO

*Congressman Marcantonio addresses the House on the plight of our Gibraltar of the Caribbean. "What are we going to do about it?" he asks. What are 100,000,000 Latin Americans thinking?*

**M**R. MARCANTONIO. Mr. Speaker, I rise at this time to call the attention of the House to the plight in which Puerto Rico finds itself. Puerto Rico is an island of 3,500 square miles, with a population of about 1,884,000 people. Puerto Rico today is doing everything possible to assist in the war against the Axis. It is giving everything it has. Its greatest contribution has been in manpower. So great has been that contribution that Puerto Rico is the only place in the United States where no draft is necessary. Puerto Rico's draft quota has been filled exclusively by volunteers, and there is always a large number of volunteers waiting to be accepted in the army.

Puerto Rico finds itself today in a plight which in some respects is worse than the plight of some of the conquered nations. The war has brought about an economic situation in Puerto Rico which is the most pitiable that we have witnessed in its entire history. Prior to the war Puerto Rico was receiving monthly over 100,000 tons of shipments. Today, after frantic appeals to our Shipping Board, less than 30,000 tons of foodstuffs are reaching Puerto Rico each month.

Now, let us pause a moment and see what are the food staples of the Puerto Ricans. Beans, rice, codfish. Dealing with the latter, may I inform my colleagues that all of the codfish supply in Newfoundland was purchased prior to Pearl Harbor by the Portuguese government. It has been openly charged and never denied that this codfish is being distributed by the Portuguese to Nazi Germany. In Puerto Rico there is therefore no supply whatever of codfish. On the docks in New Orleans there are tons and tons of rice. I have before me a report of October 24, by Mr. Paul Edwards, administrator of WPA in Puerto Rico, in which it is stated that in Puerto Rico there is practically no rice. The normal consumption of rice in Puerto Rico is about 18,000,000 pounds per month.

Prices have gone sky high. For instance, let me read from an index recently prepared by the Office of Statistics, by Mr. S. L. Descartes, of the governor's office of statistics in Puerto Rico. . . .

"The index of the retail cost of foodstuffs in Puerto Rico increased to .196 on October 14 compared to .189 on September 15."

So you have today in Puerto Rico a most serious food shortage and, literally speaking, thousands and thousands of families in Puerto Rico are facing starvation. Even such articles as soap and matches are practically nonexistent in Puerto Rico today. Besides the food shortage you have such prices as place whatever food supply there is on or may reach the island of Puerto Rico beyond the reach of the purchasing power of the people of Puerto

## The Tugwell Plan

**C**ONGRESSMAN Marcantonio's program for immediate relief of the desperate economic situation in Puerto Rico deserves the attention and support of all Americans. It represents the first, essential step that must be taken to bring the 1,900,000 people of Puerto Rico within the military and political orbit of the war against the Axis.

Marcantonio's plan is practical and subject to immediate application. It calls upon the President to exercise his authority under lend-lease to provide most of the necessary funds; it calls attention to funds now unused, assigned to the Department of the Interior for just such emergencies in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Alaska. Instead of calling for the diversion of American shipping from other vital military routes, the plan proposes the suspension of coastwise shipping regulations to permit foreign bottoms to pick up and unload cargo in Puerto Rico on their way to and from the United States.

In Puerto Rico itself, Munoz Marin, president of the insular Senate and of the majority Popular Party, has advocated a program of which the Marcantonio plan is the federal counterpart. Senator Marin, with the support of Governor Tugwell, has called for: (1) the employment, by federal or insular agency, of at least 30,000 additional workers; (2) a system of unemployment compensation for those families having no earnings "so that they would have at least simple nourishment during the crisis and while they cannot obtain work"; (3) the selling of basic foods at prices existing before the war, with the government making up the differential between cost and sales price by subsidy; and (4) a \$15,000,000 federal grant to be used in planting thousands of acres of additional land to food crops. The proposals supplement each other; both could be carried out at an estimated over-all cost of \$50,000,000.

Immediate economic relief for the people of Puerto Rico is the first, the most pressing step to be taken in applying the Atlantic Charter's principles to our Caribbean Gibraltar. One hundred million Latin Americans and colonial and enslaved people throughout the world test our good intentions by what we do for our own colony. Economic aid will not only relieve the island of acute suffering and mass starvation; it will cut the ground from under the anti-New Deal, imperialism-as-usual forces which are exploiting the pitiable condition of Puerto Rico and, by their vitriolic attacks on Governor Tugwell, are challenging the President and his conduct of the war.

Rico. Let us see what that purchasing power is. When a Puerto Rican is employed his average annual wage is a little over \$200. Puerto Rico is the only territory over which our flag flies where there has been no war boom at all, and by that I mean there are no war industries.

Further, the gasoline shortage has almost paralyzed the life of the country, as Puerto Rico depends primarily on motor vehicles for its transportation. There was some work some time ago when we were building our landing fields and various other military construction was going on; there was some employment then, but all this military construction has been completed and the result is that as of the end of September 1942, according to the WPA report filed here by its director in Puerto Rico, Mr. Paul Edwards, there were 240,000 unemployed persons on the island. The report submitted to the governor of Puerto Rico, by the Committee on Unemployment, prior to that showed that there were 176,000 unemployed. Since this report of September 1942 was submitted, it has been estimated that unemployment has now reached the figure of approximately 325,000 people, affecting about 165,000 families.

I realize, of course, that to most of us here in Congress Puerto Rico is a far, far away place, but Puerto Rico to us from a very realistic standpoint is most important, so important that we have spent many millions of dollars to fortify it so as to make it the Gibraltar of the Caribbean. It is also very vital to us from the standpoint of winning this war when we bear in mind that Puerto Rico is a very important link in the chain of Western Hemispheric solidarity. It has been so since the early days of Spanish colonialism, when Puerto Rico was the vanguard of the West Indies. The people of Puerto Rico are Latin Americans; they are an integral part of the great 100,000,000 Latin Americans. A most important factor in this war are the 100,000,000 Latin Americans and their twenty Latin American nations. To permit this condition to exist in Puerto Rico, to let this situation continue in Puerto Rico, is going to do more damage to Western Hemispheric solidarity, it is going to plunge a deeper wedge in our Latin American front than a thousand Nazi submarines in the Caribbean or in the waters around North and South America. . . .

**MR. FULMER** of South Carolina. The gentleman spoke of high prices which are working a tremendous hardship on the great masses of Puerto Ricans. I am wondering if anything is being done to hold down these prices or put a ceiling on prices in the interest of that class of people unable to pay such fancy prices.

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