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Mr. Bryan on Porto Rico

Lincoln, Neb., April 30, 1910.
Gentlemen of the House Committee on Insular Affairs:

Availing myself of the permission given by the committee when I appeared before it on the 19th of April, I beg to submit some observations on the provisions of the bill relating to the government of Porto Rico.

If I were discussing the question as an abstract proposition I would urge full and complete territorial government for the people of Porto Rico, but as the majority of the members of the committee favor a different policy I shall simply urge certain amendments to the bill in the hope that they may be adopted.

In the first place, I am convinced that the Porto Ricans should be given collective citizenship instead of being compelled to apply for citizenship individually. The fact that the platform of the two leading parties directly or by implication declared for collective citizenship ought, in itself, to settle the matter. If a platform is not binding it is worse than useless—it is a fraud, for it helps to secure political authority by false pretenses.

But the Porto Ricans would be entitled to collective citizenship even if no party had declared for it. They welcomed American occupation; for twelve years they have been loyal to the flag of our union; and they are anxious to become more closely identified with the United States. Why humiliate them by compelling them to enter the union through a door so narrow that it will admit them only one at a time?

Moreover, nothing is to be gained by our government or for our people through the adoption of a method of naturalization so odious to a friendly population. No one is excluded; every Porto Rican can come in through individual naturalization if he wishes. If it was the intention of the committee to keep some of the Porto Ricans out of citizenship it would be possible to do so by individual naturalization provided the necessary restrictions were added, and those who objected to conferring citizenship upon all might defend such a measure, but when the measure makes it possible for all Porto Ricans to become citizens simply by applying why prolong the process and hedge it about with unnecessary hardships?

It is admitted that but a few of the Porto Ricans object to becoming citizens, why not put the burden of individual action upon the few who are hostile to us rather than upon the many who are friendly and who are anxious to become citizens? Surely the committee will, on reflection, grant the very reasonable request of the Porto Ricans for collective citizenship, and thus remove a cause of dissatisfaction and discord.

The second important request of the Porto Ricans which is denied by the bill reported to the house, is the request for an elective senate; and here, too, the plan proposed by the committee produces irritation without bringing any real benefit to the administration. It ought to be sufficient to condemn the committee's plan for an appointive senate to point out that it is an un-American plan. It is European—a relic of an expiring aristocracy. In our federal government and in our states both branches of the legislature are elected, and as our government in Porto Rico will be in a sense an example to the Spanish speaking peoples of South and Central America, it ought to be made as perfect as possible. At least it ought to harmonize in its

general features with the theory of government applied in the United States.

What purpose would an appointive senate serve that an elective senate would not better secure? What evils would an appointive senate prevent that would not be more certainly prevented by an elective senate? Is it thought that an appointive senate would be more apt to support the recommendations of the administration? Before the governor's recommendations can be crystallized into law they must be approved of by both the senate and the house, and the house of representatives is elective. One house, therefore, can block an administration measure as effectively as such a measure can be blocked by two houses, and one elective body would be more likely to block the measure than two elective bodies. The dissatisfaction which must continue so long as Porto Ricans are denied the rights which we demand for ourselves as a matter of course tends to prevent harmonious co-operation between the two bodies and, moreover, the administration would be more apt to receive support in the house if there were an elective senate to share the responsibility with the house. In other words, two elective bodies would be more apt to support the administration than one elective body because they could share the responsibility and have companionship in meeting any criticism that might be directed against them. Where one body alone must give voice to the wishes of the people of Porto Rico it is much more apt to differ from a co-ordinate appointive legislative body than it would from an elective body.

An appointive senate is not necessary to furnish the governor with a legislative champion. The president of the United States has no cabinet officers in the senate to defend his policy, and yet he fares as well as the governments which make legislators out of their cabinet members.

An appointive senate is not necessary to veto measures passed by an elective house, the governor can be given an absolute veto, and this would be as effective in obstructing any improper legislation as a senate appointed by him. It must be remembered, too, that the bill reported by the committee reserves to congress the right to annul any law passed by the Porto Rican legislature even with the approval of the governor.

If collective citizenship and the elective senate are conceded to the Porto Ricans there will be no difficulty in securing an agreement on the other provisions of the bill, and then Governor Colton will have a united people behind him in his effort to develop the island.

There are two other features of the bill to which I wish to refer briefly. I believe that the original bill provided for a department of agriculture, labor and commerce, but that by an amendment the creation of that department has been left to the local legislature. I believe it would be better for the bill to create that department and put it on an equal footing with other departments. It is second to none in importance, and its creation should not be delayed. Neither should the department itself stand in a different attitude from the other departments in relation to the government at Washington.

A word as to franchises. I need hardly suggest to the members of the committee that the granting of franchises is a very delicate part of

the work of a governing body. It is a source of corruption in our own country, and the power to grant franchises is abused here even when officials are elected by the people, and when they perform their official duties amid the environments of home and in the very presence of the voters. How much more danger there is of corruption when the officials are serving away from home and acting for people who can neither elect them nor discharge them? Every possible safeguard should be thrown about the granting of franchises. No perpetual franchise should be granted anywhere, at any time, or under any circumstance. A perpetual franchise must be abhorrent to every one who has any understanding of government or who feels an interest in posterity. The shorter the term of the franchise the better. The right of revocation should be reserved in every case, and in the case of natural monopolies the right of purchase by the government should also be reserved. The referendum should be used wherever possible. As all franchises are granted on the theory that they are for the benefit of the people, the people should be allowed to ratify or repudiate the action of the granting body. If in the case of Porto Ricans it is not thought proper to allow a popular referendum on the franchise—although it requires less general information to vote upon a single proposition than to vote for candidates who have to act on a number of propositions—if, I repeat, it is not thought proper to allow a popular referendum on Porto Rican franchise, the insular legislature at least should be permitted to act upon propositions relating to franchise. No harm can come from this, for congress is in session once each year and can grant any franchise it desires in case the insular legislature refuses to approve of a meritorious proposition. There is more to be feared from the granting of franchises that should not be granted than from a few months delay in the granting of a franchise that should be granted.

I venture these suggestions not only because I believe the amendments proposed would be good for the people of Porto Rico, but because I am convinced that they would be good for the people of our country as well. The Porto Ricans are a part of the United States, and it is as important for us as for them that harmony and good will shall exist between them and the people of the United States, and good will can not exist unless it rests upon justice. When I talked to the people of Porto Rico I appealed to them to trust the sense of justice in the American heart; I now appeal to your committee to so manifest that sense of justice as to leave no room for doubt in the minds of Porto Ricans.

With great respect, etc., I am,
Very truly yours,
W. J. BRYAN.

A PETITION IN BANKRUPTCY

Many delicate compliments have been paid the fair sex by men subtle in speech, but the following comes straight from the heart of an illiterate negro, who was married in the south the other day by a white minister. At the conclusion of the marriage the groom asked the price of the service.

"Oh, well," answered the minister, "you can pay me whatever you think it is worth to you."

The negro turned and silently looked his bride over from head to foot; then, slowly rolling up the whites of his eyes, said:

"Lawd, sah, you has done ruined me for life; you has, for sure."—Harper's Monthly.