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The colony in Puerto Rico is collapsing

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of the Treaty of Paris which ended the Spanish American War in 1898.

The Puerto Rican government passed a Moratorium Law enabling it to postpone debt payment

After stating in June 2015 that the government of Puerto Rico does not have the resources to pay the enormous public debt, the reality of a US$2,459 billion debt payment looming between May and June 2015, and the imminent default of that payment, the administration of governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla adopted the Financial Emergency and Rehabilitation Moratorium Law in order to push negotiations between his government, the creditors – mainly large United States investment companies – and the United States Congress in the quest for relief in the midst of a situation that threatens to unleash a humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico.

The Moratorium Law extends broad powers to the governor in order that he determine payment of different government obligations with the scant monies available. It is an attempt to balance payment of the debt with the pressing service needs of the population which is already feeling the effect of austerity measures in essential services in education, transport, health, housing and others areas.
The initial effect of the Moratorium Law has been limits in disbursements of the Government Development Bank, which is practically lacking in funds. The Government Development Bank is the Puerto Rican institution responsible for public works financing. Besides direct public services, its fiscal woes affect infrastructure projects which create jobs and could stimulate a stagnant economy.

The United Nations speaks on the issue

In its resolution on Puerto Rico of June 2015, the United Nations Decolonization Committee stated, “Bearing in mind that the people of Puerto Rico mostly rejected its current status of political subordination on 6 November 2012, and that such status prevents it from making sovereign decisions to address the serious economic and social problems of Puerto Rico, including unemployment, marginalization and poverty.”

In the final part of the resolution the Decolonization Committee calls upon the United States to assume its responsibility regarding a decolonization process in order to enable the people of Puerto Rico to exercise its inalienable right to self determination “and to take decisions, in a sovereign manner, to address their urgent economic and social needs, including unemployment, marginalization and poverty.”

Response of the United States Congress: A Federal Fiscal Control Board for Puerto Rico with absolute power

For months the government of Puerto Rico, organizations and the Puerto Rican community in the United States have made attempts for the administration of Barack Obama and the U.S. Congress to take action on the crisis in Puerto Rico. However, the only response has been that the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives, presided by Utah republican, Bob Bishop, presented a draft bill of law entitled, “Puerto Rico Oversight,

Management and Economic Stability Act" (PROMESA). This bill of law calls for the creation of Federal Fiscal Control Board for Puerto Rico with absolute power to govern, legislate and determine the use of public funds and make financial and economic plans for Puerto Rico.

These broad powers will in effect convert the so-called Constitution of the Free Associated State, which has been in effect in Puerto Rico for the past sixty years, into a mere piece of paper. It exposes the fantasy of self-government, which the government of the United States has presented to the international community regarding Puerto Rico.

The Fiscal Control Board bill of law is stagnated

The so-called PROMESA, draft bill 4900 of the U.S. House of Representatives, proposed to address the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico under a Fiscal Control Board, has not made headway due to opposition from the most conservative members of that Chamber, who object to any measure that would delay payment of Puerto Rico's debt. They favor a Control Board but no restructuring of the debt.

At present, negotiations to bridge the gap between opposing positions that would allow the U.S. Congress to take action on the matter, are stagnated and no further action by the Congress are expected until mid-May. Serious difficulties are expected before U.S. Senate action due to the diverse interests at play and Puerto Rico's complex situation. Senate action awaits action by the House of Representatives.

Enormous opposition to the Fiscal Control Board for Puerto Rico

The wave of opposition to the proposal to impose on Puerto Rico a Federal Fiscal Control Board multiplies as its details are revealed, including that all its operations, staff and expenses will be paid with Puerto Rico public funds.

Former governor of Puerto Rico, Anibal Acevedo Vila: In the constitutional history of the United States I do not recall any organism to which the federal government has extended these omnipresent and overbearing executive and legislative powers with no weights and balances."

Senator María de Lourdes Santiago, candidate for governor of Puerto Rico of the Puerto Rican Pro Independence Party: "H.R. Draft Bill 4600, which would impose a Fiscal Control Board for Puerto Rico extends absolute power to that Board and ignores the colonial problem, which is the cause of the fiscal and economic crisis our country if going through. It will take us from a bankrupt colonial to a dictatorial colony."
Wilma Reverón, co-president and spokesperson of the National Hostos Movement for the Independence of Puerto Rico: "In the event that the federal authorities insist on imposing the Board, we are calling for resistance in the streets with civil disobedience."

Luis Gutiérrez, a Puerto Rican who is a member of the U.S. Congress representing a

district in Illinois: “The root of Puerto Rico’s problems is Washington’s excessive power for determining its destiny. The proposed Control Board adds to those vast powers, and to the little transparency or lack of authentic participation of the Puerto Rican people.

CLARIDAD, a weekly Puerto Rican pro-independence newspaper: The so-called Federal Fiscal Control Board for Puerto Rico should be repudiated by our people, not only because it is the worse expression of the U.S. government, but because it is the total overtaking of our power to decide our affairs. It is a bold attack on our capability and dignity. In the face of a weak and subordinate colonialized leadership, it is up to the forces of our people to demonstrate that Congress’ order is unacceptable, that the Board is not welcome in Puerto Rico and that if the United States is truly interested in our problems it must immediately open the way for a true process of decolonization which leads us to the only option available to us for a future: sovereignty and independence in concert with the rest of the independent nations of the world.

Actions against the Fiscal Control Board

One of the actions that stands out among those carried out against the proposed board is one recently held in front of the U.S. extraterritorial federal court in San Juan where hundreds of demonstrators came together to reject this imposition proposed by the U.S. Congress. Leaders of many political parties and organizations and members of trade-union, student, community and other types of organizations headed an enormous picket for several hours.

A march to Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla’s residence in San Juan took place today, May 1. At the activity, more than fifty representative organizations closed ranks against the Federal Fiscal Control Board for Puerto Rico. Trade union, community and religious organizations, including the Catholic Church of San Juan, participated.

Meanwhile, a broad citizens’ coalition against the Fiscal Control Board was established with the participation of more than fifty organizations including the business, cooperative, trade union, academic, student, environmental, health, religious, community, human rights, and non-profit organizations, and artists, among others.

“This Fiscal Control Board will not help the country. It will worsen the humanitarian crisis we are already experiencing. In reality, this board will not investigate the waste of public funds, it will not put politicians on trial or balance our budget so we may have a better quality of life. The draft bill of law extends power to a board that would lower the minimum wage, exclude thousands of people from the government’s medical plan, reduce or eliminate pensions, eliminate public and private worker labor rights, override environmental laws and even sell our best land to developers,” stated Jerohim Ortiz Menchaca, spokesperson for the Coalition.

Repressive actions against pro-independence activists

A week ago the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) assisted the Navy U.S. Criminal Investigations Service (NCIS) in executing orders to forcefully obtain DNA samples of Orlando González Claudio, Norberto Cintrón Fiallo y Juan Segarra Palmer, Puerto Rican. This action was part of a continuing investigation on actions against U.S. military personnel in Puerto Rico which date back three decades and have presently being reactivated. The orders were issued by Judge Jose Fuste of the U.S. extraterritorial federal court which the United States operates in Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican community in the United States speaks out on the Crisis in Puerto Rico

A Summit of Puerto Ricans in the United States took place in New York City on 22-23 April. Edwin Melendez, director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, which organized the summit, said that the purpose is to educate, connect and move Puerto Ricans to act, especially at present when different states of the U.S. are experiencing a greater migration of Puerto Ricans. Academic, trade union and political Puerto Rican community leaders and other figures in the United States participated in the summit.

The Caucus of Puerto Rican Officials Elected in the United States, which gathers approximately 40 elected officials and was established during the first Puerto Rican Summit in the U.S. in October 2015, met during the April 2016 summit. The meeting was headed by Puerto Ricans Luis Gutiérrez, José Serrano, Nydia Velazquez, members of the U.S. Congress and Melissa Mark Viverito, president of the New York City Council. Its plans include advocating for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoner, Oscar Lopez.

(Information and data taken from El Diario, NY, Friday, 22 April 2016; y El Nuevo Día, SJ, 24 April 2016)

U.S. Federal Court Judge call U.S. Congressional proposal for a Fiscal Board for Puerto Rico, "scandalous"

U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit Judge, Hon. Juan Torruella, a Puerto Rican, went before a conference held at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York and stated in no uncertain terms his opinion on possible consequences of the imposition on Puerto Rico of a Fiscal Control Board as proposed in H.C. draft bill 4900 of the U.S. House of Representatives. According to Torruella, who supports U.S. statehood for Puerto Rico, adopting this bill into law could "unleash not only simple civil disobedience and resistance, but also radicalization and direct violence as was experienced in Puerto Rico in the 1930s, 40s and 50s."

During the conference, entitled "Puerto Rico, the debt crisis and self-determination: Exploring paths to decolonization," Judge Torruella, who supports statehood for Puerto Rico, denounced what he called the "imperial plans" of U.S. 4900 draft bill, which highlights Puerto Rico's political subordination to the United States since the signing of the Treaty of Paris and invasion of the island by U.S. armed forces in 1898.

“We hope Congress and others in high positions of power will take note and consider the potentially explosive consequences of what the U.S. Congress “promises” Puerto Rico and its population of U.S. citizens, which even in the exploitative context of the United States relation with Puerto Rico is, at most, scandalous,” said Torruella.

(Information taken from daily newspaper El Nuevo Día, 20 April 2016)

Daily newspaper El Nuevo Día asks for a solution to Puerto Rico’s political status

An editorial published on 18 April 2016 in Puerto Rico’s main daily newspaper in the context of Puerto Rico’s present fiscal crisis, called on the U.S. Congress to take steps to resolve for once and for all, the political status of Puerto Rico.

The editorial in El Nuevo Día, lays out the reason for its call: “What is at risk at the present moment, is the economic survival of our Island.”

There are plenty examples of how constitutional and legal defenselessness cuts the wings of Puerto Rico in its attempts to move the economy with initiatives that provide competitiveness to make possible that which is most basic: that our people stay in the country because they have the jobs with which to provide a quality of life and a future of progress for their families.” The editorial further states that the ultimate power in the decision regarding the political status of Puerto Rico lies with the U.S. Congress.

“At this critical time for the future of our Island, Congress has unveiled, eloquently and in a way that does not go unnoticed by our people and the world, the urgency of resolving the political status. The lack of our own tools or the tools of the U.S. Congress to address the fiscal crisis, as needed, forces us to revisit the the status question”.

We do not promote any one of the political options that have been debated for decades: statehood, independence, or strengthened Free Associated State variables. It is the U.S. Congress, which has the power to decide on the territories, who should present the mechanism for enabling the people to decide, commit to respecting the will of the majority and diligently implement such will.

Words from Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar López: “I do not pay attention to time”

Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar Lopez spoke to the Puerto Rican people through a telephone interview with El Nuevo Dia newspaper reporter Jose Delgado, only days before the 35th anniversary of his imprisonment in the United States. Among other things, he referred to the possibility that U.S. President Barak Obama will release him before leaving office in January 2017.

“He will wait for a moment that is less compromising and when he will be attacked less. If he is to address the issue, he will do so after the elections because otherwise he will definitely come under attack, and he is not one to put himself in a position to be attacked,” said Oscar Lopez while also pointing out that he is not in the habit of “paying attention to time” despite his 35

years of confinement and the fact that he is already 73 years old.

Oscar Lopez, one of the longest held political prisoners in the Western Hemisphere, was arrested on 29 May 1981. He was accused and convicted along with 12 others for seditious conspiracy in relation to actions in favor of the independence of Puerto Rico.

The U.S. president, who is known to be an admirer of Nelson Mandela, has yet to act despite a strong campaign for Oscar Lopez's release in Puerto Rico, the United States and internationally, and the call by the United Nations for his release, which reflects a broad consensus in Puerto Rico for release.
It should be pointed out that political prisoner Oscar Lopez has served more time than Nelson Mandela although he was accused on the charge of seditious conspiracy, as was Nelson Mandela, the leader of freedom for Blacks in South Africa and an icon of humanity, who served 25 years.

COPRONU honors the life and sacrifice of José Rafael ¨Fefel¨ Varona

This Puerto Rican student was extremely young when he engages on a solidarity tour that took him to Viet Nam in representation of the Latin American Continental Students Organization in 1967.

Tragically, a school he and his companions were visiting was bombed as the visit took place during the U.S. war on Vietnam. Fefel died of his wounds a month later. In a recent activity of the Committee for Puerto Rico at the United Nations and film producer Eierí Ossorio, Fefel was honored as a symbol for Puerto Rican youth, students and the people of Puerto Rico for his sacrifice and martyrdom. A film on Fefel will be completed and released next year.