

Anti-Imperialism and the Good Neighbour Policy: Ernest Gruening and Puerto Rican Affairs, 1934–1939*

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Abstract. During his five years as chief US policy-maker towards Puerto Rico, Ernest Gruening strove to create a model – based on the anti-imperialist principles he had outlined in the 1920s – for a reformist policy which the United States could pursue towards the rest of Latin America. The initial support of Franklin Roosevelt allowed Gruening to position his Puerto Rican programme as one of the three ideological alternatives present in the early stages of the Good Neighbour Policy. The collapse of Gruening's scheme provided US policymakers with an early illustration of the difficulty of imposing reform with insufficient local support.

On 22 August 1939 the White House named Ernest Gruening, director of the Division of Territories and Islands Possessions (DTIP), as the new territorial governor of Alaska. Though Gruening opposed reassignment to the new post, few others lamented his dismissal from the DTIP. He had taken over at the Division five years earlier, after distinguishing himself in the 1920s for his passionate opposition to US military interventionism in the Caribbean Basin, his support for reformist forces in the region, and his progressive credentials on a host of domestic issues. At the DTIP Gruening attempted to fuse these domestic and international viewpoints into an ambitious agenda for social, economic, and diplomatic reform in the USA's major Latin American colony, Puerto Rico. The failure symbolised by his exile to Alaska provided a lesson for Washington policy-makers on the difficulties of imposing reform from the outside. That failure, however, should not obscure an equally important lesson for historians: that Gruening's anti-imperialist experiment in Puerto Rico belonged with economic internationalism and political non-interventionism as the three central components of Franklin Roosevelt's early Latin American policy.

Ernest Gruening was born in 1887, the son of a wealthy New York City

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surgeon, Emil Gruening. Educated at the city's finest preparatory schools and Harvard, he then attended Harvard Medical School at the wishes of his father, who hoped that he would take over the family's practice. Although Gruening received his M.D., a career in medicine never interested him. Instead, swept up by the intellectual currents associated with the high point of the Progressive Era in the United States, he decided to enter journalism. During the 1910s, he worked for a number of reform newspapers in Boston, earning a reputation as an outspoken critic of monopoly in the US economy and as a supporter of civil rights, civil liberties and liberalised access to birth control. Yet his search for an issue around which to orient his activities continued until his service in the US Army during World War I, when he read about the occupation of Haiti undertaken by President Woodrow Wilson. Until then a supporter of Wilson's foreign policy, Gruening could not reconcile the intervention with what he viewed as the traditional US ideals of support for reform and self-determination abroad, and he resolved to increase public awareness of the dark side of US policy in the Caribbean Basin.¹

Gruening soon received the opportunity to do so. In 1919, he signed on as editor of a Spanish-language daily in New York City, *La Prensa*. Already fluent in French and German, he quickly mastered Spanish, while his work at the paper brought him into contact with a wide array of political exiles from the Caribbean. He then moved on to *The Nation*, where, as managing editor, he spearheaded the journal's aggressive campaign to end the Haitian intervention. After two years in this position Gruening received a contract to write what he immodestly described as 'the book' on the Mexican Revolution. He spent most of the next five years in Mexico, researching the work. There he became an intimate of the Mexican Revolutionary leadership, which appreciated his sympathy for the revolution's domestic policies. Gruening's time in Mexico coincided with a tense period in US–Mexican relations. Critical of the interventionist policies of President Calvin Coolidge and his secretary of state, Frank Kellogg, he engaged in what he termed the 'constructive muckraking of imperialism', penning newspaper and magazine articles which described the nationalist policies of President Plutarco Calles favourably and which portrayed the Coolidge administration as a tool of US oil concessionaires. At the same time, Gruening's anti-imperialist instincts led him to champion crossnational alliances linking anti-interventionists in the United States with reformers in the Caribbean Basin. The outcome of the Mexican crisis, where Calles and his US supporters coordinated their

¹ Ernest Gruening, *Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening* (New York, 1973), pp. 1–32.

actions in an attempt to sway US public opinion, served as his model in this regard.²

Despite his occasionally extreme foreign policy views, Gruening enjoyed a reputation as much more than a fringe activist. Although his manuscript on the Revolution, *Mexico and Its Heritage*, strongly commended Calles and his policies,³ the book's publication also earned him widespread recognition as an expert on Mexican politics and society. George Ochs-Oakes, publisher of the *New York Times* and a supporter of Kellogg's policies in the Caribbean, described *Mexico and Its Heritage* as the finest study on Mexico published in the United States. The review in Ochs's paper contended that mastering the work would place the reader in a 'position to talk and write intelligently about the Government, people, and future of the country'. Speaking for anti-imperialists, Carleton Beals hailed the book as 'the classic work on Mexico of our time'. Gruening parlayed his fame into contacts with the nation's foreign policy elite, men such as Harvard Law School Professor Felix Frankfurter. Frankfurter, who considered Gruening 'more wisely informed' about US relations with Latin America than anyone he knew, in turn communicated Gruening's point of view to his influential friends, such as the governor of New York, Franklin Roosevelt.⁴

Based in part on his service as publicity manager in Robert La Follette's third party presidential campaign of 1924, Gruening also was well-known as a domestic reformer by the time that Roosevelt moved from Albany to the White House, in 1933. In 1927, after the completion of his book, he had returned to the United States to edit a new reform newspaper, the *Portland Evening News*. In his five years in Maine, Gruening challenged the influence of big business with his attacks against Central Maine Power, headed by the utility baron Samuel Insull. In due course he also championed increased government intervention in the economy to deal

² Gruening to Oswald Garrison Villard, 19 May 1922, File 1423, Oswald Garrison Villard Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Gruening to Carleton Beals, 22 Jan. 1924, Box 165, Carleton Beals Papers, Mugar Library, Boston University; [Gruening], 'Wall Street and Mexico', *The Nation*, 28 June 1922; Gruening, 'Will Mexico Be Recognized?', *The Nation*, 23 May 1923; Gruening, 'The Senators Visit Haiti and Santo Domingo', *The Nation*, 4 Jan. 1922; Gruening, 'Haiti and Santo Domingo Today-II', *The Nation*, 15 Feb. 1922; Gruening, 'Haiti under American Occupation', *Century*, April 1922.

³ Privately, Gruening admitted that he included occasional criticisms of Calles in the book only 'in order not to have the picture unfairly favorable' and thus liable to attack for bias. Gruening to Carleton Beals, 3 Dec. 1928, Box 168, Beals Papers.

⁴ Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and its Heritage* (New York, 1928); George Ochs-Oakes to Gruening, 28 Nov. 1928, Series 22, Box 1, Ernest Gruening Papers, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska, Fairbanks; Carleton Beals review, *The Nation*, 5 Dec. 1928; Felix Frankfurter, as recorded in talks with Harlan Phillips, *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces* (New York, 1960), pp. 241–2.

with the effects of the Great Depression. Upon his return to *The Nation* in 1933, he had established credentials as a creative reformer on a host of domestic and international issues.⁵

Gruening penned several editorials in the first months of 1933 urging the newly inaugurated Roosevelt to extend his 'new deal' to the Caribbean, and to reverse the interventionist policies of his Republican predecessors. Yet the editor soon grew discouraged with the new administration's progress. Although Roosevelt issued a vague promise to orient his hemispheric policy around the principle of the 'good neighbour', his early initiatives towards the region suggested otherwise. When unrest against Cuban President Gerardo Machado intensified in mid-1933, Roosevelt appointed Sumner Welles, who had served in the State Department during the 1920s, as his personal representative on the island. Welles quickly orchestrated Machado's replacement with Carlos Céspedes, but Céspedes's transitional government fell a week later in a coup led by Fulgencio Batista. The unrest paved the way for the emergence of a revolutionary government headed by Ramón Grau San Martín, a professor at the University of Havana and a favourite of the students active in the anti-Machado opposition. Welles recoiled from Grau's programme of economic and social reforms, and recommended denying recognition to the new regime on the grounds that it lacked a mandate from the Cuban people. Roosevelt complied.⁶

As 1933 progressed, this policy began generating criticism from some of those who had been opponents of Republican interventionism during the 1920s.⁷ In part to neutralise these anti-imperialist attacks, Roosevelt named Gruening special adviser to the US delegation to the seventh International Conference of American States, held in Montevideo in December 1933. The appointment, however, basically reflected the president's tactic of naming figures of widely varying viewpoints to key positions to check one another, thus ensuring that control over policy remained vested in his hands alone. In the Montevideo delegation, for example, Gruening's anti-imperialist outlook was balanced by adherents to a more traditional view of inter-American relations like J. Reuben Clark, ambassador to Mexico during the early 1930s, and Alexander

⁵ Gruening, *Many Battles*, pp. 48–67.

⁶ [Gruening], 'Wanted: A New Deal for Cuba', *The Nation*, 19 April 1933; [Gruening], 'Mr. Welles' Opportunity', *The Nation*, 3 May 1933; Louis Pérez, Jr., *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902–1934* (Pittsburgh, 1986), pp. 301–32; Irwin Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista: Good Neighbor Diplomacy in Cuba, 1933–1945* (Albuquerque, 1973); Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies and Practices in Latin America, 1933–1945* (Baltimore, 1979); and Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy* (New York, 1961), pp. 48–117.

⁷ For examples of this criticism, see Robert David Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 283–6.

Weddell, a career foreign service officer who had served as a US consul in Mexico during the mid-1920s. Secretary of State Cordell Hull chaired the delegation. The conference, however, took an unexpected turn when Hull, sensing the depth of Latin American opinion on the issue, agreed to the report of the Committee on Rights and Duties of States, which forbade any member from intervention in the internal affairs of another Western Hemisphere nation.⁸

Hull's decision produced a series of changes which dramatically altered the administration's approach to Latin America, which had come to be dubbed the Good Neighbour Policy. Two weeks after the conclusion of the conference, Roosevelt publicly committed the United States to a policy of political non-interference in Latin American affairs, and indicated his intention to apply the new principles to his diplomacy towards Cuba and Haiti. The policy shift signalled the temporary eclipse of the interventionism characterised by Welles's controversial tenure in Cuba, opening up the way for new voices to influence the making of inter-American policy. Hull, a devotee of Woodrow Wilson's economic theories who believed that lowering trade barriers represented the surest path to world peace, took advantage. In early 1934, he obtained presidential support for the Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act. The measure's passage married Hull's version of economic internationalism with political non-interference as the two principal tenets of the administration's emerging Latin American policy.⁹

These broader changes in the administration's approach to Latin America produced a changing perspective towards Puerto Rico as well. Initially, Roosevelt, treated Puerto Rico separately from his overall Latin American agenda as had most of his predecessors. In April 1933, the president, acting on the advice of Postmaster General James Farley, named Robert Gore, a retired insurance executive and Democratic fundraiser (who later admitted that he could not locate Puerto Rico on a map) as the island's new governor. Gore's heavy-handed approach alienated local reformers, whose protests prompted a visit to the island in November by anti-imperialist activist Hubert Herring. Herring criticised Gore for treating the Puerto Ricans as 'children' and characterised policy towards Puerto Rico as 'a test of the reality' of the president's stated intentions for improving inter-American relations. Gore's difficulties also produced a long *Foreign Affairs* article in which Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.,

⁸ For Roosevelt's early foreign policy appointments, see Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1979), pp. 5–150; for the events of the Montevideo Conference, see Dorothy Jones, *Code of Peace: Ethics and Security in the World of the Warlord States* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 79–82.

⁹ Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, pp. 118–25, 285–7.

the former governor of Puerto Rico and another of Gruening's well-placed friends, argued that Puerto Rico could 'serve as the connecting link between the two great divisions', helping the people of the Western Hemisphere overcome a 'wide misunderstanding and antagonism between the two cultures'. For Puerto Rico to fulfil this role, however, the former governor contended that all US policies towards the island needed to take into account the 'broader aspect' of inter-American relations.¹⁰

The protests against Gore's performance prompted the President to appoint Rex Tugwell, a member of his 'Brains Trust', to head an *ad hoc* committee to recommend reforms in the administration's approach to Puerto Rico. Roosevelt also extended federal relief programmes to the island by creating the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Association (PRERA), headed by his friend and one-time neighbour, James Bourne. Soon, however, the president veered in an entirely different direction, and in the aftermath of the Montevideo Conference, began incorporating Puerto Rico into his revised inter-American agenda. As the first step in this process, he transferred Puerto Rico from the jurisdiction of the War Department to that of the Interior Department, when on 29 May 1934 he established the DTIP. Indicating the role which foreign policy considerations played in the move, Gruening was the only candidate considered to head the new division. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, who joined Roosevelt in supporting the nomination, explained that Gruening's familiarity 'with affairs in Latin America and elsewhere outside of the continental United States' made him 'particularly valuable' for the post.¹¹

The Gruening appointment helped neutralise earlier anti-imperialist criticism of Roosevelt's inter-American policies. Commending the appointment for heartening 'liberals and anti-imperialists everywhere', *The Nation* termed it 'one of those acts of grace by means of which the present Administration so often redeems its political errors and disarms its critics'. The magazine's former editor, Oswald Garrison Villard, predicted that Gruening's single-minded devotion to anti-imperialism would serve him well at the DTIP, where 'what he accomplishes...will have a profound effect upon our relations with the other American republics'. Reformist forces in Puerto Rico likewise rejoiced. *La Democracia* noted

¹⁰ Hubert Herring, 'Rebellion in Puerto Rico', *The Nation*, 29 Nov. 1933; Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., 'Puerto Rico: Our Link with Latin America', *Foreign Affairs*, July 1934, pp. 271–80; Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Gainesville, 1960), pp. 53–110.

¹¹ FDR memo for Lewis Douglas, 27 April 1934, Series 400, Box 23, President's Official File [hereafter POF], Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Papers, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York; Harold Ickes to FDR, 15 Aug. 1934, Series 68, Box 18, POF; T. H. Watkins, *Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold L. Ickes, 1874–1952* (New York, 1990), p. 517.

that ‘liberals and anti-imperialists of all areas’ were celebrating the move, while *El Mundo* praised the appointment as an ‘affirmation of respect’ for Puerto Rico.¹²

Gruening, however, envisioned his new post as much more than a conduit between the administration and anti-imperialists sceptical about its intentions. He wanted to use Puerto Rico to implement his agenda of the 1920s: promoting reform in the Caribbean Basin through crossnational alliances of activists. The specifics of his programme drew on both his domestic crusades of the 1920s – especially his anti-monopoly beliefs – and his experience in Latin America, where he looked to imitate what he perceived as the best of Calles’s policies, such as broad-based agrarian reform. Gruening confronted serious obstacles in this task. Puerto Rico’s economy, dominated by US-owned sugar producers, had suffered severely from the Depression; in 1933, unemployment stood at 65 % of the one-half million person work force.¹³ In addition, any search for local political allies was complicated by the fact that the island’s three major political parties – the Liberals, the Republicans, and the Socialists – had distinguished themselves over the previous decade as more interested in amassing political power and dispensing patronage to their supporters than in initiating reform programmes.¹⁴ Nonetheless, with more than a touch of arrogance, Gruening believed that adoption of his policies would set Puerto Rico up as an alternative to the political and economic nationalism adopted by many Latin American states in response to the Depression. He also hoped to illustrate how a positive, reform-oriented policy by the US government might serve as a model for the administration’s overall inter-American agenda.

He quickly realised that to achieve this end, the power associated with the DTIP would not suffice. Accordingly, he approached Roosevelt to request a new organisation to coordinate all federal assistance to Puerto Rico, thus supplementing his primarily political powers associated with the

¹² Oswald Garrison Villard to Gruening, 17 Aug. 1934, File 1424, Villard Papers; *The Nation*, 29 Aug. 1934; *La Democracia*, 18 Aug. 1934, 29 Aug. 1934; *El Mundo*, 18 Aug. 1934; Villard, ‘Issues and Men’, *The Nation*, 29 Aug. 1934.

¹³ For the Depression and the Puerto Rican economy, see Gonzalo Córdova, *Resident Commissioner Santiago Iglesias and His Times* (San Juan, 1993), pp. 175–88; Henry Wells, *The Modernization of Puerto Rico: A Political Study of Changing Values and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 107–8; Truman Clark, ‘The Imperial Perspective: Mainland Administrators’ Views of the Puerto Rican Economy, 1898–1941’, *Revista Interamericana*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 506–9.

¹⁴ For political background, see Wells, *Modernization of Puerto Rico*, pp. 95–107; Córdova, *Santiago Iglesias*, pp. 193–252; Bolívar Pagán, *Historia de los Partidos Políticos Puertorriqueños* (San Juan, 1959); Frank Otto Gatell, ‘Independence Rejected: Puerto Rico and the Tydings Bill of 1936’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 38 (1958), pp. 26–44; Rafael Alberto Bernabe, ‘Prehistory of the Partido Popular Democrático’, unpubl. Ph.D. diss., SUNY-Binghamton, 1989.

DTIP with an economic base. Gruening scored his first victory with ease. The administrative order creating the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) was issued the next day in the precise form proposed by the new administrator. Given the president's habit of sponsoring contradictory actions of subordinates, Roosevelt's enthusiasm for the new PRRA administrator's agenda remained unclear. However, there was no doubt about the impact of the order on Puerto Rico. After the formation of the PRRA, Gruening became the political and economic czar over Puerto Rican affairs, commanding a bureaucracy which peaked at 53,000, five times the size of the insular government.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the economic troubles which Gruening hoped the PRRA would alleviate had produced a realignment in local politics. In 1932, the out-of-power Socialists and Republicans entered into a coalition, whose electoral strength produced a narrow victory in the fall election. Unfortunately for Gruening, still looking for local support to create his desired crossnational alliance, the Coalition had no interest in addressing controversial economic issues, since they pitted the agendas of the Socialists and Republicans against each other. But developments within the Liberal party offered more promise. In the wake of the election, an intra-party squabble erupted, with the Liberals' patronage-oriented leader, Antonio Barceló, being challenged by forces led by Luis Muñoz Marín, the son of the party's founder. Muñoz Marín claimed to speak for a new generation in Puerto Rico that wanted to break the 'stranglehold' of land monopoly and diversify the island's agricultural production. Such rhetoric was exactly what Gruening wanted to hear, and he thus unsurprisingly embraced the Muñoz Marín group, which also included Carlos Chardón, chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), and José Padín, the island's agriculture secretary. In a move which Padín rejoiced would 'serve notice on the Tories and the doubting Thomases that the New Deal is going', Gruening named Chardón regional administrator of the PRRA, whose executive board he also stacked with Liberal members. The Liberals in turned celebrated Gruening's economic agenda; Muñoz Marín heralded the announcement of the PRRA as the 'fundamental event for the permanent economic reconstruction' of Puerto Rico. Despite the mutual praise, however, differences remained, since, in line with traditional Liberal party dogma, Muñoz Marín also uncompromisingly supported Puerto Rican independence.¹⁶

¹⁵ Gruening to FDR, 27 May 1935, Series 400B, Box 27, POF; Executive Order 7057, 28 May 1935; Executive Order 7180, 6 Sept. 1935; both in Series 3, Box 10, Record Group 323, Records of the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration, National Archives, New York City [hereafter RG 323]; Córdova, *Santiago Iglesias*, p. 359.

¹⁶ Wells, *Modernization of Puerto Rico*, pp. 108–15; Córdova, *Santiago Iglesias*, pp. 243–56; Luis Muñoz Marín to Gruening, 25 Feb. 1935, 5 March 1935, 22 March 1935; all in Series 4, Box 2, Gruening Papers; José Padín to Gruening, 12 June 1935, 'Personnel

The position of Muñoz Marín on the matter illustrated Puerto Rico's complex three-track political system, which featured differing partisan alignments based on the questions of the island's political status, patronage interests, and issues relating to economic and social reform. This aspect of Puerto Rican politics placed Gruening in an especially awkward position, since his anti-imperialist principles logically pointed to prioritising Puerto Rican independence above all other issues. Instead, however, his specific desire to use Puerto Rico as a model for the administration's overall Latin American policy led Gruening to focus on implementing a social and economic reform package for the island. He thus needed to keep insular politics focused on this issue, while downplaying the patronage and status matters, on which the Puerto Rican economic reformers with whom he wanted to ally were divided. Ultimately, his success would hinge on his ability to achieve this goal.

By backing the Muñoz Marín wing of the Liberals so strongly Gruening obtained a committed political base on the island and thus fulfilled one of his first goals. But his tactics also meant that he inherited enemies from the moment of his appointment. One such figure was Gore's replacement as governor, Blanton Winship, a retired Army officer whose appointment had represented the last major initiative of the Ward Department's tenure as coordinator of Puerto Rican policy.¹⁷ Gruening's other major critics were members of the Coalition's majority party, the Republicans, whose legislative leader, Rafael Martínez Nadal, complained about the PRRA's 'wildly radical, impractical, and visionary schemes for which the people are not yet ready'. Illustrating the way in which insular affairs had come to be viewed through the lens of inter-American policy by all sides, Republicans such as Luis Antonio Miranda described Puerto Rico as 'the laboratory where the United States must prove to measure its faithfulness to the Pan-American policies'. Miranda called on the Coalition to challenge Gruening publicly, so as to let 'Spanish-America know of the peril behind the friendly aims that will be offered them for the sake of Pan-Americanism'.¹⁸

The determined opposition of the Republicans and Winship, compounded by the development of personal tension between Gruening and his nominal superior, Harold Ickes, prompted the PRRA head to turn to the White House for support. Despite the extreme nature of some of his

– Chardón, Carlos' file, Record Group 126, Office of Territories, Classified Files, National Archives, Washington, DC [hereafter RG 126].

¹⁷ For Winship's perspective, see 'Message of Blanton Winship', 12 Feb. 1935, Series 9-8-79, Box 938, RG 126; Winship to Marvin McIntyre, 19 Nov. 1935, Series 400, Box 23, POF.

¹⁸ *El Imparcial*, 9 Dec. 1935; Luis Antonio Miranda, 'Ernest Gruening Is a "Case"', *El Imparcial*, 13 Nov. 1936; Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal*, p. 204.

requests,¹⁹ Gruening obtained complete support from Roosevelt²⁰ through early 1936: the two men agreed on the foreign policy implications of Gruening's post. As the DTIP head observed, Puerto Rico served as the 'obvious channel for establishing closer relations with Latin America' through the execution of his three-pronged agenda. First of all, in what amounted to an early version of foreign aid, he looked to US financial and technical assistance, in this case through the PRRA, to reform the Puerto Rican economy along more egalitarian lines. Secondly, in the political arena, Gruening called for open US support of Puerto Ricans of reformist and democratic inclinations. Although the United States obviously enjoyed more leverage over events in Puerto Rico than over any independent nation in the Caribbean Basin, both of these tenets, he believed, could easily form the basis of US relations with other countries of the region. Finally, the PRRA administrator argued that these generous policies in and of themselves would improve US relations with the rest of Latin America by providing tangible evidence that the era of US imperialism had concluded. In its broadest sense, then, the Puerto Rican programme represented the third facet of the early Good Neighbour Policy, a politically positive complement, based on the principles of 1920s anti-imperialism, to Hull's politically neutral reciprocal trade agreements and the politically negative policy of noninterference and non-intervention based on the commitments made at the Montevideo Conference.²¹

Armed with strong presidential assistance, Gruening began to implement his programme. On the economic front, he focused on a broad-based rural rehabilitation effort described by one historian as 'perhaps the most (or only) comprehensive catalogue of specific problems in the insular economy' ever undertaken by a US official.²² Initially, he championed the Chardón Plan (authored by Chardón, Liberal Rafael Fernández García, and Rafael Menéndez Ramos, an independent with Coalitionist sympathies), which called for a government corporation to operate refining mills and acquire productive land. The land then would be exchanged for the marginal holdings of the *colonos* (small, independent landowners who

¹⁹ For typical requests by Gruening to the White House, see Gruening to D. W. Bell, 24 Feb. 1936, 23 April 1936; both in Series 1, Box 2, RG 323.

²⁰ For FDR's support of Gruening, see FDR to Gruening, 26 Nov. 1934; FDR to Blanton Winship, 19 July 1935; FDR to Gruening, 1 Aug. 1935, FDR, 'Memorandum for the Acting Attorney General', 31 Aug. 1935; FDR to Henry Wallace, 5 Nov. 1934; FDR to Harry Hopkins, 5 Nov. 1934; FDR to Sumner Welles, 5 Nov. 1934; FDR to Hopkins, 20 June 1935, 3 July 1935; all in Series 400, Box 23, POF; FDR to Joseph Robinson and Carter Glass, 15 March 1935, Series 9-8-98, Box 1043, RG 126; Nathan Margold memorandum, 7 May 1936, Box 255, Harold Ickes Papers, Library of Congress.

²¹ Gruening to FDR, 8 June 1935, Series 400, Box 23, POF.

²² Clark, 'The Imperial Perspective', p. 508; for the outlines of Gruening's rural rehabilitation programme, see Gruening, 'Memorandum for the Secretary', 2 Jan. 1935; Gruening, 'Memorandum on the Puerto Rican Land Policy Situation', 24 July 1935; Gruening to Harold Ickes, 28 Dec. 1935; all in Series 9-8-77, Box 929, RG 126.

grew the sugar but, the Liberals contended, had their livelihoods determined by the absentee capital which owned the refining mills). The corporation also aimed to create subsistence homesteads for the landless with the lands acquired from the *colonos*, to employ the publicly owned mills as a ‘yardstick’ to determine what processing rate private mills could charge, and to use profits (limited to no more than eight per cent) for further rehabilitation work. Chardón and the Liberals predicted that the plan would lessen the island’s dependence on sugar production, increase employment, and boost land ownership.²³

Gruening spent much of his first year attempting to come up with legislation to charter the governmental corporation which the plan required. His difficulties with the Coalition, however, hampered his efforts to obtain satisfaction from the Puerto Rican legislature. The delay gave him more time to ponder the general issue. As he did, he concluded that the Chardón Plan would deal insufficiently with the problem of monopoly, since it would position the *colonos* as monopolists themselves, as they would receive all of the choice land. Drawing on his experience in Mexico during the 1920s, Gruening decided that agricultural cooperatives, a key portion of Calles’s agrarian agenda, would represent a better solution. In a move which he himself characterised as ‘frankly experimental’, he authorised the purchase of a French-owned sugar refining mill, or *central*, at Lafayette. The PRRA sought to divide the 10,000 acres of the *central* into tracts of less than 500 acres and to organise the workers into cooperatives to control and cultivate the land. The new cooperatives could serve as a yardstick with which to keep prices down, as the Chardón Plan had desired, but would also broaden the number of landowners. The programme thus would improve Puerto Rican economic production while also satisfying the anti-monopoly tenets which Gruening had exhibited in his 1920s crusades.²⁴

From Gruening’s point of view, jettisoning the Chardón Plan made perfect sense, once he had concluded that it would perpetuate the imperfections in the island’s land tenure system. Moreover, replacing the plan with the cooperative scheme also satisfied his desire for Puerto Rico to function as a model for US policy to the rest of Latin America. How much better, Gruening thought, to achieve this purpose than for the United States to supply financial and technical assistance to help implement an initiative most associated, in his mind at least, with the agrarian programme of Plutarco Calles? Yet the move also violated his

²³ Puerto Rican Policy Commission, Report, Series 400, Box 23, POF; Gruening, ‘Background of the Puerto Rican Situation’, 1935, Series 9-8-107, Box 1073, RG 126.

²⁴ Gruening to Harry Hopkins, 24 April 1936, Series 1, Box 9, RG 323; Gruening to Carlos Chardón, 4 May 1936, Series 2, Box 2, RG 323; Gruening, ‘Memorandum to the Comptroller General’, 30 Jan. 1936, Series 1, Box 27, RG 323.

commitment to reforming Puerto Rico through a crossnational coalition, rather than simply by policies imposed from the outside. The *colonos* formed an important part of the Liberal electoral coalition, and moreover some Liberals resented what they considered as the shunting aside of the work of one of the party's major figures, Chardón. The matter raised especially difficult problems after the chief of the PRRA's rural rehabilitation division, Rafael Fernández García, resigned over the issue. Gruening overcame Fernández García's opposition, but only by importing figures from the continental United States to run the cooperative programme, especially in the PRRA's legal division, headed by the talented and ambitious Francis Shea. This decision in turn aroused resentment from Puerto Rican lawyers, who, charging the PRRA with favouring continentals over local talent, filed a formal protest.²⁵

However, Gruening remained focused not on conciliating the Liberals but on his programme's international ramifications. This goal led to his undertaking a host of explicitly political and diplomatic initiatives which technically fell outside the scope of either the PRRA or the DTIP. For example, on his first visit to Puerto Rico after his appointment, he delivered a speech denouncing Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo and announcing his desire for Puerto Rico to provide a counterweight to the dictatorships of the Caribbean. In the name of maintaining the 'American tradition of freedom', he pressed Winship to support legislation granting Puerto Rican citizenship to the Dominican exile Miguel Pardo. (His contacts with reformers from the Dominican Republic dated from his time at *La Prensa*.) Gruening also championed the greater use of Puerto Ricans in the US diplomatic service, a policy which he believed would improve the US image in Latin America and facilitate cultural exchange among the nations of the Western Hemisphere. This ideological approach presaged that of the post-World War II Democratic Left, in which Muñoz Marín and many other Puerto Rican Liberals played prominent roles.²⁶

Gruening's foreign policy agenda also guided his policies towards the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). He hoped that the university would 'assume the intellectual leadership of the Island', contrary to 'the plight of most Hispanic-American universities which are subject to the whims of the current dictator'. The UPR thus not only could 'become a cultural

²⁵ Rafael Fernández García to Gruening, 20 Aug. 1936, Series 4, Box 1, Gruening Papers; Fernández García to Harold Ickes, 23 Dec. 1936, Box 255, Ickes Papers; Fernández García to Gruening, 18 July 1936, Series 1, Box 44, RG 323.

²⁶ Gruening to Blanton Winship, 16 March 1935, Series 9-8-51, Box 794, RG 126; Gruening to Thomas Walter Page, 21 Jan. 1935, Series 9-8-60, Box 840, RG 126; Gruening quoted in *El Imparcial*, 9 Nov. 1934, 1934 Scrapbook, Gruening Papers. On the ideology of the Democratic Left, see Charles Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile: The Anti-Dictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945-1959* (Coral Gables, 1974).

link between the two Americas’, but remain ‘the one university in a Hispanic country which under its present sovereignty will remain free, untrammelled upon’. Due to the PRRA’s limited budget, however, improving the UPR robbed funding from virtually all other educational programmes in the island. PRERA educational initiatives (which had concentrated on supplementing the local appropriations for elementary and high schools as a way of lowering the island’s 47% illiteracy rate) were slashed, leading to frantic requests from José Padín, now commissioner of education, at least to wind the assistance down gradually.²⁷

As with his abandonment of the Chardón Plan, his international agenda prompted Gruening to overrule a key local ally, in this case Padín, despite his rhetorical commitment to making policy in conjunction with the Liberals. In addition, Gruening fully understood that his educational policies would adversely affect most Puerto Ricans. But his broader goals dictated making the UPR a centre of inter-American intellectual exchange and a model for other Latin American universities, even at the expense of diverting scarce educational resources from elementary education. On this issue as on most others, Gruening’s decisions derived from foreign policy concerns, not an intrinsic desire to reform Puerto Rico. Usually, from his point of view, the two interests coincided, but when they did not, he consistently chose the policy option that he believed would best serve his goal of making Puerto Rico a model for US policy towards the rest of Latin America.²⁸

In fact, however, there was little to suggest in 1935 that Roosevelt intended to use Latin America as an arena for launching a policy centred on the principle of promoting international reform. Indeed, during his administration’s early stages, dictatorships either came to power or consolidated their positions in Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic with little or no protest from the United States.²⁹ Despite these trends, however, Gruening understood the president’s way of operating well enough to know that as long as his

²⁷ Gruening to Herbert Priestly, 24 Sept. 1934; Gruening to Carlos Chardón, 17 Nov. 1934; both in Series 9-8-94, Box 1031 RG 126; Gruening to Blanton Winship, 8 April 1935, Series 9-8-51, Box 794, RG 126; José Padín to Gruening, 11 Oct. 1935; A. B. Hawes to Gruening, 13 Nov. 1935; both in Series 3, Box 26, RG 323.

²⁸ For Gruening’s earlier writings on the need for Latin American countries to focus on primary rather than secondary education, see Gruening, *Mexico and its Heritage*, pp. 520–8.

²⁹ For contrasting historical interpretations as to whether FDR intended political non-interference to produce the rise of dictatorships in the Caribbean Basin, see Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, pp. 142–145; David Green, *The Containment of Latin America: A History of the Myths and Realities of the Good Neighbor Policy* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 22–110.

Puerto Rican programme showed some signs of success, hope remained that it could come to form a more prominent part of the administration's overall inter-American agenda. He, more than anyone else, realised the way in which the unexpected developments at the Montevideo Conference had fundamentally altered the administration's Latin American policies as a whole. Looking to repeat the success of 1933, he lobbied for the inclusion of two of his allies, Puerto Rican Liberal Jorge del Toro and anti-imperialist Samuel Guy Inman, for the US delegation to the 1936 conference of Western Hemisphere states, scheduled for Buenos Aires.³⁰

The bid to secure appointments for del Toro and Inman succeeded, but by the beginning of 1936, events closer to home were consuming the bulk of Gruening's attention. On 23 February, Hiram Rosado and Elías Beauchamp assassinated the chief of the insular police, Colonel Francis Riggs. Rosado and Beauchamp were members of the Nationalist party, which was committed to using violent tactics to win Puerto Rican independence. Police captured the assassins, and killed them when they allegedly attempted to escape. Party leader Pedro Albizu Campos then used their funeral to deliver an impassioned address claiming that the police killings proved yet again the need for Puerto Rican independence, and he promised a future campaign of terrorism in retribution for the deaths. In response, Winship ordered raids on Nationalist headquarters, after which Albizu Campos and seven other Nationalists were indicted and convicted on charges of conspiring to overthrow the federal government in Puerto Rico.³¹

As Gruening fully understood, essentially the Nationalists were raising an anti-imperialist banner against the United States in the months before the Buenos Aires conference. The party thus had the potential of destroying one of the central purposes of his Puerto Rican experiment – using the island as an example of the reformist intentions of the United States in the Caribbean Basin, thereby improving inter-American relations in general. In addition, the terrorism threatened the congressional appropriations on which Gruening's rural rehabilitation and educational initiatives depended. Several members of Congress openly wondered why the United States should continue to fund a massive reconstruction programme if the majority of Puerto Ricans, as the Nationalists claimed, desired independence, and if a substantial minority were willing to engage in terrorism to achieve that goal. Finally, the increasing prominence of the Nationalists clearly raised the issue of the island's political status, thus

³⁰ Gruening to Samuel Guy Inman, 23 Feb. 1936, Box 14, Samuel Guy Inman Papers, Library of Congress.

³¹ Gerald Johnson, 'Puerto Rico: Imperial Headache', *Baltimore Sun*, 16 June 1937; *New York Times*, 25 Feb. 1936.

threatening to displace economic and social reform questions on the insular political agenda.³²

Again Gruening's foreign policy goals came into conflict with his commitment to reforming Puerto Rico through a crossnational coalition. His local allies, the Liberals, were badly divided on the issue of independence. The party remained committed to the concept in the abstract, but, with the exception of Muñoz Marín, most Liberal leaders feared the short-term economic and social effects of independence. They therefore had no desire to see the issue assume a prominent place in insular politics. But Gruening now believed that the United States needed a bold initiative to prove to Latin America that, despite the claims of the Nationalists, its days as an imperialist power had passed. Therefore, without consulting any key Liberal leaders, Gruening gambled. He travelled to the country residence of Senator Joseph Tydings (D-Maryland) to discuss joining forces on Puerto Rican matters. Tydings, who had sponsored Riggs for insular police chief, responded to the assassination by denouncing the 'ingratitude' of the Puerto Ricans for the 'many millions' of dollars the United States had poured into the island. He threatened to use his influential position on the Senate Interior Committee to block future funding for Gruening's Puerto Rican initiatives. In addition, he privately remarked that he considered independence 'essential to stop the influx [of Puerto Ricans] into New York'. Therefore, he announced his intention to introduce a resolution to allow the Puerto Ricans to vote on whether they desired independence. Reassured by Gruening's visit that the two shared a similar perspective on Puerto Rican matters (although in fact they clearly did not), the Maryland senator agreed to allow Gruening to draft the resolution for him.³³

Privately, Gruening rejoiced that he seemed to have regained control over the situation. He informed Ickes that a referendum would be 'consistent with the enlightened policies of this administration in relation to its neighbors'. The proposal thus could neutralise anti-imperialist criticism directed against the United States for holding a colony, especially if, as Gruening expected, Puerto Rican voters rejected independence. Given this goal, the PRRA head pushed for a 'clean' referendum, with as 'generous' economic provisions as possible. After Interior Department lawyer Frederick Bernays drafted a bill which called for imposing harsh tariffs on Puerto Rico if the voters supported independence, Gruening

³² *Washington Post*, 25 Feb. 1936.

³³ Millard Tydings quoted in *Washington Star*, 1936 Scrapbook, Gruening Papers; Gruening diaries, 28 Feb. 1936, 3 March 1936, 7 March 1936, 15 July 1936, Gruening Papers. Contrary to the claims of Surendra Bhana, Gruening's diaries indicate that the independence referendum scheme originated with Tydings. Bhana, *The United States and the Development of the Puerto Rican Status Question, 1936–1968* (Lawrence, 1975).

ordered changes, ‘so as not to becloud the basic issue of the referendum with recriminations or objections that the question as presented did not offer a fair alternative’.³⁴

Bernays did as requested, but, unknown to Gruening, he already had shown his first draft to Tydings. When Gruening met with the Maryland senator to present the bill, Tydings instead indicated his preference for Bernays’s original version. Unlike Gruening, the Maryland senator desired to punish the Puerto Ricans, not to work with them in a joint reform effort. The next day, he introduced the measure in the Senate, announcing, in words which must have made Gruening wince, that ‘the American system is not functioning properly in Puerto Rico’. The Tydings bill called for a referendum to coincide with the 1936 insular elections. An affirmative vote would lead to independence within four years, but would also subject Puerto Rican products exported to the United States to a 25 % annual increase in the tariff. All sides recognised the bill’s punitive nature, but Gruening was in an awkward position, since he had already persuaded Roosevelt to endorse the measure. In addition, as he had hoped, the introduction of the Tydings bill received substantial praise throughout the Latin American press, thus preventing the Puerto Rican issue from negatively affecting inter-American relations.³⁵

The bill, however, further soured Gruening’s relationship with the Liberals. His endorsement drew a frantic plea for an explanation from Chardón, who was justifiably concerned about the measure’s unfavourable economic terms. Muñoz Marín went even further, and severed his ties with Gruening over the issue.³⁶ To pacify the other key Liberals, Gruening travelled to Puerto Rico in early June for consultations. In what the PRRA head described as a ‘long and important discussion’ with Chardón, José Padín, and Jesús Piñero, president of the *Asociación de Colonos*, Gruening explained that he ‘did not think the present situation could continue, with one group knifing and sabotaging reconstruction, the other group accepting it but saying, in effect, “as soon as we’ve got your money we’ll shove off” and the third group trying to force us out by violence’. For Gruening, the ‘only hope lay in a New Deal party

³⁴ Gruening to Harold Ickes, 13 March 1936, Box 255, Ickes Papers; Gruening to Millard Tydings, 27 March 1936, Series 9-8-68, Box 864, RG 126.

³⁵ Alexander Weddell to Cordell Hull, 29 April 1936; Gruening to Ralph Louisbury, 7 May 1936; both in Series 9-8-68, Box 864, RG 126; Gruening quoted in *Washington Star*, 1936 Scrapbook, Gruening Papers; Tydings quoted in *New York Times*, 24 April 1936.

³⁶ For Gruening’s dispute with Muñoz Marín, see Mathews. *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal*, p. 255; Gruening, ‘Memorandum for the Secretary’, 21 Jan. 1937, Series 4, Box 1, Gruening Papers; Gatell, ‘Independence Rejected’, p. 30; Luis Muñoz Marín, *Memorias: Autobiografía Pública, 1898–1940* (San Juan, 1982), pp. 126–31.

supporting reconstruction and permanent relationship with the US'. He now even detected a possible advantage in the Tydings bill. Since the measure's economic provisions were so draconian, they might encourage the Liberals to transform themselves into a pro-reform party on economic and social issues committed to the political status quo, thereby firming up the deteriorating transnational, anti-imperialist alliance which he considered crucial to the long-term success of his programme. In addition, he was confident that a vote against independence would solidify his base both within the administration and among those in Congress such as Tydings who looked to use the nationalist agitation as an excuse to cease funding PRRA reform efforts.³⁷

In theory, Gruening had developed a clever plan to solve a number of related problems simultaneously; in practice, the move backfired badly. Since ensuring the failure of the independence referendum was a precondition for his scheme's realisation, Gruening decided to involve the PRRA, as quietly as possible, in the fight. Although the Tydings bill had not yet cleared Congress, he started touring the island making speeches in opposition to independence, always carefully maintaining, in a quite specious distinction, that he spoke only in his capacity as a private citizen and not as PRRA administrator. When pressed on the fairness of his tactics, Gruening blandly replied that he only wanted the people of Puerto Rico to 'be fully apprized [*sic*] of what they are voting for and what the consequences of their decision may be'. Yet again, he demonstrated a lack of confidence in the ability of his local supporters to make his case themselves. Yet again, he paid for his decision, when he lost control of the matter completely after the pro-Muñoz Marín newspaper *El Mundo* charged that he was purging from the PRRA those Liberals who favoured independence. All major Puerto Rican newspapers as well as the *New York Times* picked up the story, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed an official protest with Ickes claiming abridgment of freedom of speech.³⁸

In fact, the PRRA purge related not to Gruening's concern about the political opinions of PRRA employees but to the other traditional element of insular politics: the search for patronage. Throughout 1935, Gruening had been badgered with complaints from the Coalition alleging that the

³⁷ Gruening to Blanton Winship, 31 July 1936, Series 9-8-68, Box 864, RG 126; Gruening, 'Memorandum Concerning Puerto Rico', 24 Sept. 1936, Series 4, Box 2, Gruening Papers; Gruening diaries, 2 June 1936, 4 June 1936, 7 June 1936, Gruening Papers; *El Mundo*, 26 April 1936, 1936 Scrapbook, Gruening Papers.

³⁸ Gruening to Earl Hanson, 27 July 1936, Series 4, Box 1, Gruening Papers; Gruening quoted in *La Correspondencia*, 28 Sept. 1936, 30 Sept. 1936; *El Mundo*, 20 Sept. 1936; all in 1936 Scrapbook, Gruening Papers; Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal*, p. 272.

Liberals were using the PRRA as a political vehicle to regain power in the 1936 election. To combat this criticism, he appointed Luis Raúl Esteves, head of the PRRA personnel office, to head a committee of ‘known political impartiality’ to look into the charges. Fully expecting the investigation to rebuff the claims, he planned to make the findings public in time for the election, presumably giving the Liberals a boost. Instead, Esteves uncovered evidence that influential Liberals had demanded payoffs from PRRA employees. Blaming Chardón for the abuses, Gruening flew to Puerto Rico in September to take charge of the enquiry himself. The administrator then fired those PRRA employees charged with using their positions for political purposes and ordered the remainder to resign from any political posts they held. The *New York Times* detected ‘an indication of a definite rift’ between Gruening and his onetime allies.³⁹

Indeed, the disputes over patronage and independence intensified the split between Gruening and the Liberals which the modifications of the Chardón Plan had initially produced. The whole matter highlighted for the administrator the difficulties of imposing reform from the outside. He now began attacking leading Liberals for refusing to stand up for principles. In fact, Gruening deserved most of the blame for the Liberal abuses. He assumed, without any real foundation for doing so, that most Liberals shared his desire to use the PRRA as part of an ideologically driven scheme to remake Puerto Rico in the name of improving inter-American relations. In any case, Gruening’s political manoeuvrings set in motion a series of events which immobilised the local political forces with which he had hoped to ally. At the Liberals’ 1936 convention, Muñoz Marín called for abstaining from the election to protest against the unfairness of the Tydings bill. The motion was lost by only one vote, and he and many of his followers declined to recognise the validity of the result. Meanwhile, in an ironic twist, the Coalition successfully transformed the campaign into a referendum on the merits of the Tydings bill, arguing that those supporting the measure – complete with its harsh economic provisions – should vote for the ostensibly pro-independence Liberals. This tactic produced a sweeping election victory for the Coalition. The Liberals were left to complain that they had lost due to the ‘confusion caused by E.G.’s irresponsible action in having the Tydings Bill presented as an administration measure’.⁴⁰

³⁹ Gruening radiogram #821 to Carlos Chardón, 25 July 1936; Gruening radiogram #992 to Raúl Esteves, 25 Sept. 1936; both in Series 5, Box 4, RG 323; Gruening diaries, 31 Aug. 1936, 8 Sept. 1936, 9 Sept. 1936, 11 Sept. 1936, 12 Sept. 1936, 24 Dec. 1936, Gruening Papers; Wells, *Modernization of Puerto Rico*, pp. 117–18; *New York Times*, 21 May 1936.

⁴⁰ Luis Muñoz Marín to Ruby Black, 5 Nov. 1936, copy in Box 48, President’s Secretary’s File, FDR Library; Gatell, ‘Independence Rejected’, pp. 39–42.

By this time, further cooperation between Gruening and his one-time allies had become all but impossible. Chardón brought the matter to a head in early November. Unsurprisingly, the issue centred on who would have ultimate political power. Chardón demanded an end to the continued freedom of action enjoyed by Francis Shea's legal division, which reported directly to Gruening and oversaw the cooperative programme. When Gruening refused, his deputy promptly resigned, triggering the departure of twenty other key members of the PRERA hierarchy. In late 1936, Muñoz Marín, though obviously a biased witness, spoke for the majority of politically active Puerto Ricans when he commented that 'the PRRA functions like a madhouse because Ernest, who does not know how to exercise authority, also does not know how to delegate it'.⁴¹

Quite beyond Gruening's administrative shortcomings, he suffered from a more fundamental problem, one perhaps most perceptively recognised by his old bureaucratic rival, James Bourne. Bourne argued that due to the limited resources available from the US government, alleviating the island's 'extreme unemployment' had to form the top priority of Puerto Rican policy, not enacting a broad-based reform agenda which was geared more towards long-term change. The former head of the PRERA portrayed his successor as chief US policymaker towards Puerto Rico as so attached to a pre-conceived ideological agenda that he had lost sight of the day-to-day needs of the average Puerto Rican for whom he theoretically was responsible. In effect, Bourne concluded that the PRRA was 'deceiving the public with glowing promises for the future which can never be realized', because Gruening had failed to secure sufficient local support to sustain his agenda in the long term.⁴²

With his programme in disarray, it was clear that Gruening's hope of using a successful venture in Puerto Rico to demonstrate the merits of his ideological perspective would not occur. An obvious sign of Gruening's deteriorating bureaucratic position came in late 1936, after the PRRA head requested a \$6 million appropriation for supplementary relief. The Bureau of the Budget (BOB) refused the appeal, commenting that Gruening could use funds targeted for longer-term economic restructuring efforts. Gruening then turned to Roosevelt, pleading that his entire programme 'was considered, planned, and put into operation' out of the belief that PRRA funds would not 'be used for temporary work relief'. Roosevelt refused to overrule the BOB's decision, forcing the PRRA staff 'to curtail the scope' of its programme. Harold Ickes quickly took

⁴¹ Guillermo Esteves et al., to Gruening, 22 Oct. 1936; Carlos Chardón to FDR, 11 Nov. 1936; both in Series 400B, Box 27, POF; Gruening diaries, 21 Oct. 1936 Gruening Papers; Luis Muñoz Marín quoted in Watkins, *Righteous Pilgrim*, p. 522.

⁴² James Bourne to FDR, 21 April 1936, Series 400, Box 24, POF.

advantage of the president's loss of patience with Gruening's anti-imperialist experiment. First, Ickes arranged a revocation of the executive order establishing the independence of the PRRA. Then, he forced Gruening's resignation as its head.⁴³

Although weakened, Gruening's position at the DTIP allowed him to remain a player on Caribbean affairs. Soon, however, his US base began to crumble as well. On Palm Sunday 1937, police in Ponce killed nineteen Nationalists who had planned a political demonstration but refused to disarm. Conceding that the 'whole business was unspeakably unnecessary and tragic', Gruening privately admitted that his representing the side accused of killing Latin American independence agitators created a 'situation...full of ironic paradoxes'. Anti-imperialists in the United States, once his strongest supporters, were not so circumspect. When Winship issued a formal report completely exonerating the police for the killings, US anti-imperialists led by Roger Baldwin and the ACLU called for an independent enquiry into the matter.⁴⁴

More fundamentally, the massacre prompted US reformers to question the basic thrust of Gruening's agenda as a whole. For example, the relatively moderate *New Republic* used the Ponce affair as a starting point to attack the entire basis of the PRRA programme. Concluding that 'as things are now going, we seem in some danger of developing conditions like those in Ireland before the Free State, with increasing armed resistance directed partly against "Yankee imperialism" and partly against the morass of poverty', the journal saw 'no point in going on with the expenditure of enormous sums for relief while we also continue the economic policies that make Puerto Rico's poverty ever deeper'. Those most estranged from Gruening joined forces in 1937 to form the Committee on Fair Play for Puerto Rico (CFPPR), an organisation funded by the ACLU and committed to urging a review of the island's 'political status', a tacit endorsement of independence.⁴⁵

Ironically, just as he came under the most intense criticism from US

⁴³ Gruening to FDR, 14 Sept. 1936, Series 1, Box 45, RG 323; W. F. Banse to Gruening, 17 April 1937, Series 1, Box 2, RG 323; FDR, 'Memorandum for the Acting Director of the Budget', 13 Aug. 1936; both in Series 400B, Box 27, POF; FDR to Gruening, 28 Oct. 1936, Series 1, Box 44, RG 323; Harold Ickes to Gruening, 16 Feb. 1937, Series 36, Box 10, Gruening Papers.

⁴⁴ Gruening to Lewis Gannett, 3 April 1937, File 1882, Gannett Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Gruening to Earle James, 21 Aug. 1937, Series 4, Box 2, Gruening Papers; Miguel Guerra-Mondragón to Roger Baldwin, 5 April 1937, Vol. 1062, p. 177, ACLU Papers Mudd Library, Princeton University; Baldwin to Gruening, 15 May 1937, Vol. 1062, p. 205, ACLU Papers.

⁴⁵ 'The Puerto Rican Problem', *New Republic*, 14 April 1937; Roger Baldwin to Oswald Garrison Villard, 19 Jan. 1938, Box 114, Villard Papers; CFPPR form letter, n.d. [late 1937], Vol. 1064, p. 185, ACLU Papers.

anti-imperialists, Gruening's dismissal as head of PRRA changed the nature of the issues with which he dealt. It thus allowed him to return to some of the purer anti-imperialist crusades he had championed while out of government, such as his demand that the United States bestow upon Puerto Rico full political and institutional equality, and avoid any policy that resembled 'outmoded colonialism'. He also pressed unsuccessfully for an end to discriminatory treatment of Puerto Rico in foreign economic policy, while promoting to the 'utmost' the inclusion of Puerto Rican initiatives in the State Department's new Division of Cultural Relations. Finally, Gruening urged reviving his plan for the UPR to serve 'as a Pan American University acting as a cultural bridge between the Americas and as a place of contact for the students and scholars of the two Americas'. Pointing to the increasingly turbulent international environment, Gruening claimed that 'world events and national policies' made his agenda 'of transcendent importance'.⁴⁶

In fact, however, the changing international environment rendered such primarily cultural overtures increasingly out of touch with White House priorities on Puerto Rico. Concerned more generally about the possibility of Nazi expansion into Latin America, Roosevelt began viewing Puerto Rico in terms of its military rather than cultural value. In May 1939, he named his former naval chief of staff, William Leahy, to succeed Winship as Governor. Gruening, who was not consulted about the appointment, protested to Ickes against this 'obvious ignoring of all the burning economic and social problems of P.R'. He charged that the 'Puerto Ricans have been handed a Governor much as Mussolini might hand the inhabitants of Ethiopia or Libya a new Military Governor'. Nonetheless, the DTIP head realised that in the world of the late 1930s his protests most likely would carry little weight. With regret, he admitted that the anti-imperialist spirit of the 1920s had passed: 'for the moment and undoubtedly for some time to come, national defense will have the fullest sway'.⁴⁷

With even Gruening conceding that defence considerations would dominate US foreign policy in the foreseeable future, no ideological reason any longer existed for Roosevelt to retain him as head of the DTIP.

⁴⁶ Gruening, 'Memorandum for the Secretary', 20 Dec. 1938, Series 9-8-60, Box 840, RG 126; Gruening to Leo Rowe, 24 Jan. 1939, Series 9-8-94, Box 1031, RG 126; Gruening diaries, 26 Jan. 1939, 4 April 1939, Gruening Papers; US House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings, Social Security*, 76th Congress, 1st session, pp. 1659–1662, 1668 (15 March 1939).

⁴⁷ Gruening to Roger Baldwin, 4 Feb. 1939, Series 9-8-59, Box 825, RG 126; Gruening to Oswald Garrison Villard, 20 July 1939, Box 114, Villard Papers; Gruening to Eric Thomsen, 21 June 1940, Series 230, Box 1, Gruening Papers; Gruening diaries, 12 May 1939, 18 May 1939, 31 May 1939, Gruening Papers.

Gruening's agenda represented a phase of the Good Neighbour Policy which by 1939 had passed. The president, looking to avoid the public controversy that might come from an outright dismissal, bided his time until the fall, when rumours of ethical improprieties by the governor of Alaska, John Troy, dictated Troy's resignation. Gruening was offered the job, and Roosevelt made it clear that he had little choice but to accept. The anti-imperialist experiment in Puerto Rico had come to an end.

In an ironic twist, Gruening's reassignment afforded him an opportunity to revive his political career. He played a leading role in Alaska's battle for statehood, and in 1958 won election as one of Alaska's first two US senators. In the Senate, Gruening emerged as a perceptive critic of the US foreign aid programme, especially John Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, which he faulted for its obsession with fulfilling an ideological agenda (in this case anti-communism) at the expense of securing sufficient support from local reformers. The senator noted that, in the postwar world, the whole concept of foreign aid, especially to the underdeveloped world, was relatively new. Therefore, US policymakers knew 'very little as yet about inducing innovations in alien cultures'. Gruening, however, had learned about the topic during his days with the PRRA. And he had come to recognise the importance of ensuring local support for any reform efforts. He therefore doubted that US assistance alone would promote long term economic development in Latin America.⁴⁸

Gruening's inability to recognise the difficulties of imposing reform from the outside thirty years earlier does not diminish the importance of his reformist experiment in analysing the early stages of Good Neighbour Policy. Throughout the 1930s, Roosevelt's approach to Latin America operated in a state of flux. Three quite different visions – the political noninterventionism associated with the Montevideo Conference; the economic internationalism typified by Cordell Hull's reciprocity treaties; and the reform-based, positive policy championed by Gruening – competed for dominance in a bureaucratic battle which revolved around the president. Ultimately, Roosevelt spurned all three options, and in 1938 and 1939 began to convert the Good Neighbour Policy into what amounted to an anti-Nazi alliance in the Western Hemisphere. Before that time, however, Gruening's anti-imperialist agenda formed a key element in the administration's overall approach to Latin America, an option not pursued on a broader scale in the 1930s, but one which maintained an appeal for US reformers in the years following World War II.

⁴⁸ For the most forceful articulation of Gruening's position on foreign aid, see US Senate, Committee on Government Operations, *Report, United States Foreign Aid in Action: A Case Study*, 89th Congress, 2d session, CIS Document #S0918.