

## “The Butterfly”

Editorial of *La Correspondencia*  
published on July 31, 1908

When last March our illustrious friend Doctor M. Zeno Gandía introduced a joint resolution in the House of Delegates (Cámara de Delegados) in order to settle the litigation between the People of Puerto Rico against the Catholic Church, he knew well what he was doing. The profound knowledge and great training that this compatriot has in our country's affairs allow him to see far away and inspired the foresight reckoned today as good by the resolutions in Washington.

Mr. Zeno Gandía wanted to free Porto Rico of the disastrous litigation in which the ignorance of Governor Winthrop had set our people. A sum of a thousand pesos placed on his disposition to pay the attorneys did not yield another advantage to the country other than burdening its public funds and no other glory than the youthful former governor leaving the island when, at the time of his ejection, he had not won any of the court cases nor had he informed the People of Puerto Rico of their current status.

By fortune, the Puerto Ricans' vigilance was prepared to compensate the visible effect of *the new methods* of the wide-eyed governor. Dr. Zeno Gandía estimated that joint resolution number twelve would put order to the abandoned affair of the church property litigation and had the honorable chance to highlight yet again that the Union of Puerto Rico is a government's Party that can give lessons to the arrogant many who have taken too seriously the old yarn about [American] superiority. The Union-led legislature unanimously approved joint resolution number twelve. There was no voice of discord. It was necessary for Puerto Rico and the Union Party, unanimously, through its mindful delegates, to declare imperiously necessary to conclude these disastrous lawsuits.

Public opinion gladly welcomed the news; the bishop of the diocese, Monseigneur Jones, and the defense attorney of the Catholic Church's interests in Puerto Rico, the illustrious Mr. Hernández López, even though he had won those cases in the Supreme Court of this island, were willing, generously and charitably willing to settle all discord and favor, inasmuch as possible, in a dignified transaction, the interests of the People of Puerto Rico. When Governor Post learned about the resolution, he expressed his absolute agreement with it, offering his decisive support to it.

### Acts of Incorporation

[sites.northwestern.edu/lawreligion/acts-of-incorporation](https://sites.northwestern.edu/lawreligion/acts-of-incorporation)

But as joint resolution number twelve passed from the house (cámara) to the cabinet (consejo), it found its defeat there. Some Department Chiefs “waged war” against the resolution. Some uttered words of disdain and displeasure against it. Others believed that the legislature invaded “the faculties of the Attorney General” and that it did not have the right to ponder such an affair. Doctor Celso Barbosa rose with his distinctive eloquence to fight the project. How could one deem good a project emerging from a Union-led legislature, presented by a member of the Union party, specifically Union member Dr. Zeno Gandía? Doctor Barbosa led the contest for the opposition and the project, in its third reading, was vanquished in the cabinet.

After this, mysterious shadows covered the consequences. President Roosevelt and many sensible men thought that it was rash to direct Puerto Rico to an outcome to which the government in Washington did not want to direct the Philippines nor the Cuban government want to direct Cuba. In Cuba and the Philippines, the suits were settled. Secretary Taft’s intervention and good will toward the Vatican performed the good deed.

The exertion of influence, Catholic and various other kinds, took place and it culminated...*in a request of Puerto Rico’s papers*. Governor Post gave a detailed report of the occurrence. Double, triple, fourfold copies of acts and minutes were taken from the house and the cabinet. There was much indecision and ambiguity in the cabinet. The acts of the Executive Cabinet of Puerto Rico are merely a very brief index of what takes place there. These acts are an abridged index and unintelligible to whoever was not present in its sessions; *La Correspondencia* affirms that they will never be useful to write the history of this. The thick of things is not extant in the acts. The words, those that serve to catch men just as the fish hook catches fish, are not written down in those Puerto Rican acts that are written down in a way that does not satisfy Puerto Ricans.

However, the information gathered made its way to Washington. An energetic movement of reaction was said to be taking place in Puerto Rico. Common sense, judiciousness, and wisdom all revealed themselves in a moment against the necessity and the love lost for Puerto Rico.

After this, everything remained silent. Now the butterfly emerges from its chrysalis. Behold the *butterfly*, according to a telegram addressed from Washington to the *New York Herald*:

[the following paragraphs quote an article from the *New York Herald* (July 23, 1908), which states that Secretary Robert Bacon would be part along with two representatives of the Catholic Church of a three-party commission to solve the

### Acts of Incorporation

[sites.northwestern.edu/lawreligion/acts-of-incorporation](http://sites.northwestern.edu/lawreligion/acts-of-incorporation)

pending church property cases in Puerto Rico, which were like those in Cuba and the Philippines.]

The initiative of the legislature of Puerto Rico could have settled the disputes with the Catholic Church. According to the Foraker Act itself, the legislature is the only entity that has the right to decide on the settlement and establish its shape with the participation of the representatives of the Catholic Church. But the majority of the Executive Cabinet entrusted itself to squander all logic and ignore the rights of the People of Puerto Rico, not the ones that it has but fail to recognize, but rather those that, even if miserly, the Foraker Act established.

Now, if God does not remedy it, it is not the People of Puerto Rico who will settle its lawsuits but the government in Washington through a commission. It befell on Puerto Ricans to realize this work of reason and judgment but the majority of the Executive Cabinet desired to show a sample of its efficacy in the island and of the significance of that sample speaks the commission that Washington is sending to Puerto Rico to move forward the legislation of the Union members of the House of Delegates [or unionist house of delegates] and to deauthorize by its presence the reproachable conduct of the cabinet's majority on these affairs.

Maybe the right of the legislature was not unknown. Maybe a solicitation of the intervention of Puerto Ricans gathered in an extraordinary session of the House could have taken place. Maybe in this way, at least once, the unrecognized right of Puerto Ricans to intervene in the affairs of their country (patria) could have been saved.

Nevertheless, it is good that the unjust and reckless lawsuits against the Catholic Church are decorously solved in benefit of the same interests of the island. Nevertheless, maybe we can also behold the spectacle of the majority of the cabinet—that voted “Nay!” on this affair just a few months ago—now voting “Yea!” giving proof of its independence of character, the firmness of its convictions, and the magnitude of its superiority, forethought, and prudence.

One would hope that if the case were to make its way again to Dr. Celso Barbosa, he would vote nay. Even when we disagree with him, we prefer to see him remain consequent with himself.

### Acts of Incorporation