

Pity the poor Puerto Ricans

THERE'S AT LEAST ONE PROMISE you'll not get from U.S. President Donald Trump.

Although he did visit Puerto Rico on Tuesday and had a chance to witness the incredible destruction wrought by two hurricanes, you'll not hear him throw support for Puerto Rico becoming the 51st U.S. state.

Nor do we expect him or anyone else in his administration to acknowledge that apart from all the island's difficulties, including a \$72-billion governmental debt, the island's roughly 3.4 million residents face precisely the same situation that triggered the revolutionary war in the 1770s: the imposition of taxation on citizens who have been denied representation.

In 1773, the British Parliament passed the Tea Act, which provided for taxation of tea shipments abroad. Colonists objected to the Act because they believed it violated their rights as Englishmen to "No taxation without representation" that is, be taxed only by their own elected representatives and not by a British parliament in which they were not represented. (Protesters had successfully prevented the unloading of taxed tea in three other colonies, but in Boston, embattled Royal Governor Thomas Hutchinson refused to allow the tea to be returned to Britain.)

Currently, all residents of Puerto Rico enjoy a strange version of U.S. citizenship, in that while they are deemed to be citizens, they alone among the 350 million citizens have no representation in the U.S. Congress. All they have is a single individual who can sit in the House of Representatives as a "delegate" who can speak but has no vote.

Were the island (perhaps with the nearby U.S. Virgin Islands) to be granted statehood, the new state would have the same two senators allotted to the other 50 states, and its population (greater than that of 20 other U.S. states) would elect five members to the House of Representatives.

We wonder whether any significant number of Americans has ever considered why a nation founded by opponents of imperialism cannot see that it has been practising a worse form than that in the British Empire, which 150 years ago had no problem passing the British North America Act which set the stage for Canada to enjoy full-fledged independence from the "Mother country."

President Trump maintains that his administration is doing as much for the island as it did for Texas and Florida following hurricanes Harvey and Irma. But two weeks after Hurricane Maria crashed into Puerto Rico as a Category 4 storm, the island is dealing with a humanitarian crisis as millions remain without electricity and water, and limited access to gasoline and cash. Most of the island is without power, with the exception of people and facilities using generators.

CNN reporters based in Puerto Rico say the recovery effort is moving at a glacial pace. They base that conclusion on more than a dozen interviews with residents, local relief workers and small-town mayors.

Federal officials and Puerto Rican government leaders say the recovery efforts are "united." But last Saturday President Trump accused the mayor of San Juan of "poor leadership" and on Tuesday suggested much of the problem was a failure of truckers to reach areas of need.

A CNN report on Monday said the Port of San Juan, where much of the humanitarian aid is arriving, doesn't have enough truck drivers, and even if it did, many trucks lack the diesel fuel to deliver food, water and other essentials.

And whereas it took only a few days to restore power to roughly 4 million Floridians, thanks to aid from utilities as far north as Canada, there is no similar presence in Puerto Rico, where the local utility expects it will take four months to repair its dilapidated system.

Would any of this be the case if Puerto Rico had been granted statehood along with Alaska and Hawaii? We doubt it.