

A new, violent order at the University of Puerto Rico

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This essay describes the development of and the state's reaction to the recent student protests at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). The Puerto Rican state seems to be probing how much violence it can get away with when dealing with protests that undermine neoliberal economic reforms and the moralistic, law-and-order discourse that accompanies them. The economic reforms and the violence unleashed against the students combine to exacerbate existing inequalities and reduce access to higher education for socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Keywords: University of Puerto Rico, student strike, police brutality, neoliberalism, democracy, tuition

Introduction

Whatever its shortcomings, the public university remains a symbol of educational opportunity, in some measure still committed to investing in the public good. As such, it is an institution particularly susceptible to the kinds of erosion brought about by neoliberal reform, and also one of the spaces where a critique of such erosion is more likely to emerge. Historically, it has often been a locus of resistance where movements and alliances have been forged, refined and challenged.

This essay will briefly describe the trajectory of and the state's reaction to one such movement: the recent student protests at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). The latest events in the island's public university system mirror those at many

other public universities around the world in that they have made the oftentimes abstract critique of neoliberal doctrine, policy and practice frighteningly concrete. In the case of the UPR, students are contesting 'austerity measures' imposed by the university administration under the guise of a looming national 'financial crisis' that has systematically funneled public funds away from public institutions and into private hands and profit. This classic enactment of neoliberal doctrine has combined intensive economic reform, fast-tracked in the name of a fiscal 'emergency', with a moralistic discourse that appeals to 'law and order' as practice but also as basic value (Treanor, 2005). Broad-ranging in its effects, and often coupled with neoconservative values and

policies, neoliberalism is reshaping higher education institutions throughout the world (see Shumar and Canaan, 2006), bringing with it the use of authoritarian forces and strategies to protect the market and its assumptions (Collins, 2006) and exacerbating existing inequalities via the reduction of access to higher education for disadvantaged populations (Giroux and Giroux, 2004; Naidoo, 2006). In a way that has become familiar around the world (Klein, 2007; Giroux and Giroux, 2006; Treanor, 2005), state violence becomes a necessary complement of broad and fast-paced political and economic reforms. The state seems to be probing how much violence it can get away with when dealing with protests that undermine their economic agenda. By following the key events surrounding the student movement that began in Spring 2010 this essay will highlight some of the ways in which the violence unleashed against the UPR has turned it into a testing ground for the neoliberal state.

First signs: 2008-2009

Neither the globalized neoliberal rationality nor its influence on university affairs are new in Puerto Rico. The last two decades of the twentieth century were characterized by attempts to place the UPR (and the island's economy) firmly inside the so-called knowledge economy, increase the role of the sciences, and attract outside funding

(Colón-Zayas, 2005). Tuition had been increased several times since 1980, although it never attained the high levels that are considered normal today in public universities in the United States (Ladd and Rivera-Batiz, 2006). But, the university remained relatively protected (Colón-Zayas, 2005) from the more intense reforms applied to other parts of the public sector, where partial or total privatization was implemented in areas such as health, public housing, K-12 education and public utilities (Colón-Reyes, 2006).

Soon after the island's 2008 elections, governor-elect Luis Fortuño (who presides the pro-statehood New Progressive Party of Puerto Rico, or NPP, and is a member in excellent standing of the Republican National Committee in the United States) started to appoint the members of his cabinet. One of the first was José Figueroa Sancha, a former assistant FBI director and now the new superintendent of the island's police force. Figueroa Sancha quickly announced his commitment to a return to 'zero tolerance' policing (known in Puerto Rico as *la mano dura*, or 'iron fist'), that had been implemented before with much noise and little success under Pedro Roselló's governorship from 1993 to 2000 (Picó, 1999), and had been criticized for exacerbating inequalities via the targeting of dark-skinned and poor Puerto Ricans (Santiago-Valles, 1995). The appointment of Figueroa Sancha was soon followed

by a more controversial decision pushed forward by Fortuño, when the NPP-dominated Legislative Assembly passed Public Law 7. This new law declared a state of fiscal emergency and authorized the government to fast-track the dismissal of 17,000 public employees. It also allowed for the expansion of private contracting, including companies hired to manage the layoffs themselves, and to cut funds to the public university system. State funds allocated to the UPR, by law, amount to 9.6% of the total annual budget; Law #7 did not alter the percentage but did exclude a number of sources from its base, thus adding substantial new cuts to the UPR's budget, already depressed due to the contraction of the economy. In April 2010, the resulting deficit was calculated at 169 million dollars. (Rivera, 2010).

Seven months later, and following island-wide protests and a general, non-violent strike in October 2009 against the layoffs (Bonilla, 2010), the government of the capital city of San Juan suddenly decided to strictly enforce existing regulations against public drinking. It was an ominous precursor to what was yet to come for the university. Large numbers of national and municipal police, including riot police, targeted Avenida Universidad, a street that lies directly in front of the UPR campus in the district of Río Piedras, widely known as the social meeting grounds of bars, clubs and restau-

rants for undergraduate students. Instead of simply fining violators up to \$500, as the law stipulates, the officers chased students down the street and tear gassed them, even inside the campus dorms. In one case a young woman ended up in the hospital with a badly wounded thigh; she was not outside during the arrests, but was reached by a tear gas canister shot inside her dorm's lobby (Hernández-Pérez, 2010). Ordinances against the consumption of alcohol in the street have been developed in many Puerto Rican towns, however they had never been enforced as violently as on this occasion, nor do they traditionally involve the use of riot police or tear gas².

Since then, the violence perpetrated against protesters has become so severe that on March 10 2011, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) executive director Anthony Romero (Romero, 2011) issued an open letter to the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice on the question of police brutality in Puerto Rico. In the letter Romero called on the Civil Rights Division, which has been investigating the Puerto Rican police since 2008, to complete its long-standing investigation and take into account the most recent reports of widespread abuses committed against University of Puerto Rico student protesters: 'Students have been mercilessly beaten, maced with pepper spray, and shot at with

rubber bullets,' Romero wrote. 'Police have also applied torture techniques on immobilized student protesters, including the illegal use of nightsticks to provoke serious and permanent injuries, and the application of pressure in the neck, eye and jaw of the protesters to provoke pain and cause unconsciousness. At most events young women are the first to be targeted for police violence and have also been sexually harassed, groped and touched by police.'

The Student Strike: Spring 2010

Because it is determined by a formula that reflects the overall economic climate in Puerto Rico, the university's budget was already depressed before the passing of Law 7. The additional cuts, however, spelled disaster well beyond the initial estimates: The university now faces an estimated annual deficit of between \$240 million and \$300 million (Colón, 2010).

In April 2010 the UPR administration announced that tuition waivers, traditionally given to athletes, band and choir members, and honor students, would be eliminated for students eligible for Pell Grants, which are granted on the basis of financial need. Essentially, the measure (touted as part of the solution to the university's financial crisis) disqualified financially needy students from receiving institutional merit-based aid, and as such mirrors attacks on need-based aid in the United States³

where active budget proposals both in the House and the Senate include substantial cuts to the Pell Grant program. Students repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, sent letters and requested to meet with the administration to discuss this decision. Faced with the administration's silence, they decided to launch a strike.

Originally planned as a two-day stoppage, the strike ended up lasting almost 10 weeks. Although one would hardly know it from the U.S. media, the students' massive protests repeatedly paralyzed Puerto Rico's 11-campus, 65,000-student public university system, during the Spring of 2010. During the strike, students in several campuses and especially Rio Piedras and Mayagüez, organized large demonstrations and artistic activities. They also developed participatory forms of organization and decision making that involved the creation of area committees camping out inside campus near the different colleges and/or points of entry ('portones') to the university. Each camp group in Rio Piedras and Mayagüez had its own distinctive styles and rituals. Some had solid alliances with other causes (environmental, labor, pro-independence and LGBTT, for example), some, especially in Rio Piedras, had particular disciplinary affiliations and identities (Humanities, Natural Sciences, and the like). But all groups were active participants of inclusive and frequent plenary sessions where all major deci-

sions were discussed collectively.⁴ A central committee, the 'Comité Negociador Nacional' (CNN), including 2 student representatives per campus, was created to negotiate with the administration. Students also, and famously, created their own media and media corps, including some sites that are still going strong, for example the online newspaper Rojo Gallito, websites like Estudiantes de la UPR Informan, and online radio stations like Radio Huelga and Resistencia Colegial.⁵

In one of the main sections of his first budget address, on April 26 2010,⁶ governor Luis Fortuño framed his administration's position toward the UPR strike and towards resistance in a more general sense. In his speech he called the student strikers 'members of a tiny minority' driven by selfish, 'ideological' motives as opposed to a 'silent majority' that 'really wants to study.' He referred to public, affordable higher education as a 'privilege' that Puerto Rico provides to its students at no small cost to its citizens. 'Tuition paid by students covers hardly 3% of the university's budget; the rest is paid by us taxpayers,' he said, contrasting responsible citizens with the protesting students. 'That is why our people—a just and noble people, but also respectful of law and order, and believing in democracy—get upset when they see what we have all witnessed at the university.' In this way he framed the strikers as 'chaotic' and 'selfish', in need of

a 'law and order' his government would be glad to provide.

Officials and public figures—including ex-governor Romero Barceló, Police Superintendent Figueroa Sancha, chief of staff Marcos Rodríguez, and UPR Board of Trustees president Ygrí Rivera—echoed the governor's sentiments, portraying the students as selfish, privileged, disorderly, and ideologically driven. Disparaging the students and their cause, politicians and administrators speaking to the media, especially radio, appealed to the 'silent majority' and described the strikers as socialists, leftists, drug users, anarcococos (anarchist crazies), and even terrorists.⁷ The administration also announced plans to increase tuition by \$800.00 per year through the establishment of a 'special fee', and published a number of full page or prime-time anti-strike advertisements in major newspapers, radio and television stations.

Meanwhile, the 'silent majority' failed to materialize, and the strike was repeatedly ratified by student majorities in different campuses. The faculty soon followed suit. In May, faculties from all 11 campuses got together in a historic national faculty assembly and formally expressed support for the student movement and requested the resignation of University President José de La Torre and president of the Board of trustees Ygrí Rivera.

By June, the mainstream press and popular opinion seemed to

side with the students. The bully-like, inarticulate clumsy Goliath that was the administration was pitted against the smaller, more agile, articulate, and largely peaceful and media savvy students' David. Editorials in major newspapers urged the university administration to negotiate with the students, as did San Juan Superior Court judge José Negrón Fernández, who named an ex-judge, Pedro López, as the mediator. Sixty-nine days after the strike began, the students ended it and an agreement was signed by a majority of the trustees that included some important victories: Tuition waivers would remain in place; the imposition of the \$800 annual fee was postponed, pending reexamination and discussion; and university employees and students who participated in the strike would not be subject to administrative sanctions (Díaz-Alcaide, 2010). The agreement, however, was not signed by either Ygrí Rivera or José Ramón de la Torre.

The Backlash: Summer and Fall 2010

The government did not miss a beat. Aggressively pursuing their agenda, Fortuño and the NPP-dominated legislature set about undermining democratic governance at UPR, both in the administration and among students. On June 21, Fortuño signed a law that had been fast-tracked through the legislature the same day, expanding UPR's Board

of Trustees from 13 to 17 members. He announced the names of the new members the very next day (Bauzá, 2010). To put this in context, UPR, with fewer than 65,000 students, now has almost as many trustees as the New York State University system (SUNY), with more than 400,000.

Attuned to the legislature's activities, members of student media, unions, and environmental groups attempted on June 30 to observe a legislative session in which several key new laws would be discussed—including the criminalization of protests in public spaces, the commercial development of environmentally protected areas, and the abolishment of student assemblies and their replacement with an anonymous electronic voting system (Fontáñez, 2010). But the Capitol that morning was closed to the public and surrounded by riot police, despite the fact that the legislature's sessions are open to the public under the Constitution. Numerous incidents of police brutality against demonstrators as well as members of the press were documented that day by both mainstream and alternative media.⁸

During the ensuing months, the new majority on the Board of Trustees installed chancellors on several campuses who were openly rejected by faculty assemblies and search committees. Attacks by administrators and politicians resumed, with a clear moralistic undertone that

characterized opposition as ‘leftist’ and therefore ‘disorderly’, directed at striking students and supporting faculty members. Fortuño’s chief of staff, Marcos Rodríguez-Ema, told the press that strikers had ‘leftist, ideological motivations’ and should be taken out of campus ‘a patadas’ (kicked out), together with their ‘profesores bandidos’ (an expression that literally means ‘bandits’ but also means ‘shameless’). The chancellor of the extremely peaceful Cayey campus asked for police intervention on the grounds that ‘there are just too many leftists here’. At the Mayagüez campus, the new chancellor declared that any demonstrations or protests were to take place in a newly designated ‘public expression zone’ located in an old athletic track far away from campus buildings—and potential audiences. The Puerto Rican satirical online newspaper *El Ñame* wondered whether such a move was not, after all, equivalent to sending protesting students to the moon to ‘freely’ express what nobody would hear.⁹

In December, Fortuño signed the law that made student voting remote and electronic, effectively eliminating open, public debate in student assemblies and saying that the new system would protect the ‘true majority’ from politicized groups (Primera Hora, 2010). Soon after, the trustees ratified the postponed \$800 fee, to be implemented in January, without so much as a glance at student and faculty proposals—some of which

even agreed to allow students and employees to shoulder more of the university’s financial burden as long as the trustees agreed to demand that the legislature undo the cuts to the university budget mandated by Law 7, as well as to claim monies owed to the university by other government agencies estimated at \$300 million (Caro, 2010; 80grados, 2010). All these proposals were ignored, however, and the student fee simply implemented.

The Second Strike: Winter 2010-2011

These developments prompted the students at the Río Piedras campus to mobilize for a second strike, beginning with a 48-hour stoppage on December 7–8, with the option to begin an indefinite strike on December 14. Then, in the early-morning hours of December 7, when the two-day strike was to commence, private security guards hired by the university demolished the gates to the Río Piedras campus to prevent the students from barricading themselves in as they had done earlier in the year. Most of the private guards were young men from impoverished communities with little training and education. They had been hired—in a surreal turn of events—via Facebook by the ex-wrestler Chicky Starr, well-known years ago for his cheating ways in the ring and now a recruiter for the company Capitol Security (Bauzá, 2010). Tension between the students and the guards



Fig. 1: Photo by Ricardo Alcaraz, *Diálogo*.

increased dangerously and violence was deflected just in time by a group of students, who after telling the guards that the students 'are not your enemies, but your siblings', and that their quest, after all, was one of educational justice so that low-income communities had better opportunities, offered to shake hands and embrace.

By December 9, private guards, riot police, and Puerto Rican police had virtually occupied the campus. They have, with few interruptions, remained ever since. The police occupation of the UPR campus beginning in December marked the first time that the police had entered university grounds in the decades since the drafting of the No-Confrontation

Policy, created to promote non-violent negotiation between conflicting groups at the university. Developed in the late 1980's following violent confrontations between police and students during the upsurge of university activism in the 1970s and 1980s, the policy required that the police stay off campuses (Ramos et al, 2008).

To make matters worse, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico ruled on December 13 that university students do not have a right to go on strike. Because students are not employees, the Court argued, what they 'call 'strike' is simply an organized protest.' As a consequence of this decision, the UPR administration was now legally empowered to

'regulate the orderly exercise of free speech and association within the university community.'¹⁰ Immediately after the Court's ruling, the chancellor of the Río Piedras campus circulated a letter announcing that large gatherings (of any kind, including artistic) and demonstrations on campus would not be permitted until January 12, when classes were to resume, in order to 'preserve safety.' The chancellor's decision was later found unconstitutional.

Despite the students' efforts to defy the crackdown by insisting on their right to protest, the \$800 fee has remained in place. It is expected to bring in an annual \$40 million. Meanwhile, the Board of Trustees has decided to request a \$75 million line of credit for new construc-

tion projects that will be outsourced to private developers. Adding insult to injury, one of the projected buildings will house the Army ROTC and bring it back into the main campus area, after they were removed to the campus most remote area in 1971 (Rodríguez Graciani, 1972) due to their controversial nature and the opposition of pro-independence and anti-war groups on campus. Historically, the presence of the ROTC has been a focus of conflict and protest, seen by some as a symbol of US colonial domination and military power, by others as an ethically problematic intrusion of practices and discourses related to permanent war in university space, and yet by others a misuse of institutional funds and spatial resources. (See



Fig. 2: Fuerza de Choque. Photo courtesy of Ricardo Alcaraz, January 25th, 2011.



Fig. 3: Fuerza de Choque. By Ricardo Alcaraz, January 25th, 2011

Yudkin, 2005 for a review). The assignment of local resources (space, employees and funds) to the federal program has been described before as problematic (Brusi, 2005), but it clearly becomes an even worse provocation in the midst of a much-touted fiscal ‘crisis’. Today, the Rio Piedras ROTC program (the largest in the system) serves only about 100 students (López, 2011). The board’s decision raises important questions about the administrative balance being made between educational, financial and symbolic priorities.

‘Order’ through violence

Although students and their supporters have faced police violence since the first strike began, it intensified in the winter once the \$800 fee was instituted and students defied official limits on their expression. Now there were incidents every day, and numerous students were arrest-

ed, with many of the women reporting being groped by the arresting officers (Stanchich, 2011). In January, UPR professors again joined the chorus of denunciations, condemning the techniques used by the police during the arrests as torture (Díaz, 2011). In February, riot police attacked demonstrators at a sit-in at the Capitol with rubber bullets, arresting more than 150. The same week, a ‘paint-in’ [See figures 3-5] in which students gathered at the university to paint slogans against the fee and the police presence on campus ended in chaos after the police attacked the demonstration and dozens of student activists as well as passersby’s, ended up wounded or arrested (CMI, 2011).

University faculty and employees joined the students’ protests against the police violence and occupation of the university, culminating in the resignation of UPR president De la



Fig. 4 & 5: After decades of a no-state police policy on campus, they are now a constant presence. Photos courtesy of Ricardo Alcaraz, Diálogo Digital, Feb.2011.

Torre on February 11, 2011. Following a massive march of some 15,000 persons on February 12, Fortuño, who who had spent the weekend in Washington at the Conservative Political Action Conference, returned to Puerto Rico and announced that the police would be withdrawn from campus. By the 25th, however, after the students carried out a 24-hour stoppage to protest the new annual fee and the fact that the administration was ignoring alternative proposals, the police had returned [Fig. 1 &2]. The new interim president declared that they were there to stay (Caro, 2011).

If the university became a testing ground for the violence of the neo-liberal state, it has also become one for an exhausted student movement that has come under increased criticism, including from within its own ranks, for tactics such as wearing hoods, closing down the campus, and throwing smoke bombs inside buildings.¹¹ This critique reached its highest point in March when Ana Guadalupe the Río Piedras chancellor, was assaulted by an angry mob of protesters. The government and its supporters immediately condemned the incident; some in the media who had supported the students, like Mayra Montero, a popular columnist for *El Nuevo Día*, now scolded them and called the strike 'a failure' (Montero, 2011). Some lamented the incident for its improvised and violent nature, so markedly different from the nonviolent yet

creative and assertive expression people had come to expect from the student movement. Yet others have noted that the state and the university administration were quick to investigate, arrest, and prosecute students for pulling Guadalupe's hair and throwing water at her, but rarely, if ever, investigated the numerous and well-documented abuses committed by police against the students. In May 2010, for example, videos and photos posted online supported allegations that Assistant Police Superintendent José Rosa Carrasquillo had repeatedly kicked a subdued student in the genitals, prompting the ACLU to demand that he be dismissed and charged with assault (Andrade, 2010).

Conclusion: The Shrinking University

Although the use and abuse of police forces and the erosion of civil rights are the most visible -and the most visibly violent- tactics of neo-liberalism being tested at the UPR, they are not the only ones. They complement concerted efforts to shrink the institution and funnel public funds away from it. Although the administration has not explicitly stated plans to close campuses or eliminate programs, it publicly bases its revenue projections on an estimated student body of 50,000 students, which is 15,000 fewer than in 2008, and the lowest enrollment number since the early 1970s. When the administration reported that about

54,000 students had registered in late January and early February, it called this 'a success.' (Inter News, 2011) The number of registered students has declined since 2010 for a variety of reasons: some have been asked to leave, as exchange students recently were, for 'security reasons.' Some have left because of the conflict, as the administration is quick to point out. And some have left because they simply can no longer afford it, though their number remains unknown.

Perhaps the most significant factor in the loss of students, however, has been the deliberate elimination of course offerings, which prevents students from being able to achieve full-time status. Low-income students are particularly vulnerable to this, since to qualify for a Pell Grant students must register for at least 12 credits. These low-income students who leave will become particularly attractive as 'customers' for private colleges. Private colleges may also end up benefitting from the way that the legislature plans to use \$30 million to 'help' the university's budget. Instead of giving the money directly to the troubled institution so that the fee could be reduced for everyone, it will be given away to individual students selected by a board as a 'scholarship.'

In the 'scholarship' program described in the news,¹² as well as in policies such as forbidding student assemblies (thus discussion) and instituting electronic voting

system in their place, we are witnessing an increased emphasis on the individual student vis a vis the institution, and the reinforcement of a 'consumer' identity (see Bauman, 2007), where the state makes higher education more expensive but promises to 'help' individuals 'purchase' their credits; Meanwhile 'citizenship' gets eroded through the limitations placed on civil rights. It is a move, again, with an antecedent in the 1990's, when Puerto Rico's Department of Education pushed for parents to contribute funding and supplies to the public education system, and proposed a voucher system for some kids to attend private schools (Colón-Reyes, 2006). It is also a move towards the personal, to a 'student as client' as opposed to 'student as citizen' model which in turn is part of a more general neoliberal penchant for collapsing the public into the private, for rendering social problems as personal ones, all of which has the effect of 'depoliticizing politics itself...limiting citizenship to the act of buying and purchasing goods.' (Giroux and Giroux, 2004 :121)

More pragmatically, turning institutional funds into individual aid also facilitates the movement of public money into private hands. It would not be at all surprising for these 'scholarships' to eventually morph into a sort of 'voucher' system that students would be able to use in the private colleges that are proliferating on the island. Indeed, the delib-

erate shrinking of the UPR system is equivalent, if not identical, to the privatization of higher education, a trend already well established in Puerto Rico in areas such as public housing and public health (Colón-Reyes, 2006).

Shrinking the student body has the automatic effect of increasing the client base for private higher education institutions in the island. This would be consonant with the broader neoliberal agenda of Fortuño, who once served on the Board of Directors of one of the largest private education institutions in Puerto Rico, the Ana G. Méndez university system. The consequences of this agenda cannot be underestimated; it would be devastating for the diversity of the student body at the UPR. Because socioeconomic inequality translates into pre-college educational inequality, students from poorer communities tend to have lower admission, retention, and graduation rates (see Brusi, Díaz and González, 2010). As the university becomes smaller, the students most likely to be affected (either because they are not admitted or because they cannot find enough course credits to retain their financial aid) are precisely those with the most economic need. This has implications for the student profile and institutional diversity, as it reinforces an existing tendency for middle class students to study in the public university while low-income students go to private institutions of higher cost and lower graduation

rates (IPEDS, accessed February 2010). The tendency is not unsimilar to what is happening in the U.S., where low-income and non-traditional students are underrepresented in public flagship universities and overrepresented in for-profit higher education institutions where their four year graduation rates tend to be low-and their student loan debt high (Haycock, Lynch and Engle, 2010). Policies that disproportionately impact low-income students may also affect Puerto Rico's ability to face its current and future social and economic challenges, which require that we address socio-economic inequalities through increasing the quality of public education, including higher education (Colón-Reyes, 2006; Ladd, 2006 and Rivera-Batiz).¹³

As elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean, inequalities of access to higher education have the effect of magnifying existing inequality and increasing the migration of talent and unemployment (Aponte-Hernández, 2008). Historically, albeit sometimes ambiguously, the people of Puerto Rico have viewed their public university not as a cost or as a burden but as an investment—the kind of investment most needed in times of economic crisis. The fast tracking of economic reforms, and its coupling with a legal moralistic discourse of 'order' in Puerto Rico are not limited to the university, but characterize other struggles, especially environmental ones. For-

tuño's government is aggressively pushing forward a gas-pipeline energy project, and doing so over the vigorous objections of the public, civil society, and a significant number of faculty and students involved in the resistance movement as activists and scientists (Justicia-Doll, 2010). Like the UPR's and other recent reforms, the pipeline has been imposed in the name of 'emergency', this time an 'energetic emergency'. Civil disobedience camps are being established in different parts of the island to resist the construction of the project, already awarded to a number of private companies, without finishing the permit process and in some cases before the declaration of 'energetic emergency' that justifies the construction of the pipeline (Pacheco, 2011).

As this article went to press, ex-president De La Torre declared in an interview that he had been subject to undue intervention from the part of the governor's office, and had been forced to name specific chancellors and impose the annual student fee, among other things (López, 2011). Given the public university's need to protect and reclaim itself as the literal and metaphoric space for thinking creatively and independently about the meaning and practice of democracy, the stakes involved in the case of the University of Puerto Rico are high. It is not only students who are being threatened by the demotion of their civil rights; indeed all Puerto Ricans are

facing a similar threat.

NB: A previous version of this article appeared in the magazine *NACLA-Report on the Americas*, April/May 2011 issue.

Endnotes

¹ Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States. Its inhabitants are U.S. citizens and can travel freely between the island and the continent, however they cannot vote in U.S. presidential elections or have voting representatives in Congress.

² Bringing in 'riot-police' forces in the absence of an actual riot seems to be a common tactic of the neoliberal state in dealing with actual or potential protests in other parts of the world. See for example the recent events in Barcelona, Spain (<http://www.20minutos.tv/video/egmnBO47-los-mossos-cargan-contra-los-indignados/0/>), where protestors were attacked in the name of hygiene, in order to 'clean' the space.

³ <http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/newsroom/2011/04/gop-budget-would-deny-pell-gra.shtml>

⁴ Each campus had a distinct organization. The description above reflects the organization typical of Rio Piedras and Mayagüez. Smaller campuses had only one or two camps. The Cayey campus had a unique model-it had representation not only of students but also of teaching and non-teaching personnel.

⁵ For a list of blogs, websites, and indie radio stations, see: luchasrum.wordpress.com

press.com/2010/05/10/recursos-para-estar-al-da-con-la-huelga-de-la-upr

⁶ Luis G. Fortuño, 'Mensaje de Presupuesto,' speech, April 26, 2010, fortaleza.gobierno.pr/pdf/Mensaje-sobre-Presupuesto-AF-2011.pdf

⁷ José Ramón de la Torre, 'Vandalos(...) anarco/locos,' interview, Radio Isla, December 8, 2010, radioisla1320.com/?p=1793

⁸ Coverage of the events of that day, June 30th, 2010, in the press included *Diálogo* ([diálogodigital.com](http://dialogodigital.com)), *El Nuevo Día* (endi.com), *Primera Hora* (primerahora.com) and student newspaper *Desde Adentro* (rojogallito.blogspot.com).

⁹ Oscar Marrano, 'UPR Garantiza Derechos De Estudiantes: Establece Áreas De Expresión Pública En Mona y Caja De Muertos,' *El Ñame*, December 10, 2010, elname.com/2010/12/upr-garantiza-derechos-de-estudiantes.html; Cangrimán, 'De La Torre Designa La Zona Fantasma Como Área De Expresión Pública Del Sistema UPR,' *El Ñame*, January 19, 2011, elname.com/2011/01/de-la-torre-designa-la-zona-fantasma.html

¹⁰ Juan A. Hernandez, 'UPR Student Strike Starts Today at Río Piedras: De La Torre Says 'No Way' to Most Proposals,' *Puerto Rico Daily Sun*, December 14, 2010, prdaily.com/news/UPR-student-strike-starts-today-at-Ro-Piedras

¹¹ See 80grados.net for a number of articles pertaining to these debates.

¹² http://www.wapa.tv/noticias/locales/estudiantes-recibirian-doble-ayuda_20110114201653.html

¹³ See also McKinsey and Co. (2008) for an analysis of the impact of inequality in access to higher education to the economy of the United States.

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