

Introductory Note

The following paper is a revision of one I originally wrote and presented at the 2011 Historical Materialism Conference in London. It was initially intended as more of an exposition than an analysis of the events narrated. The revised version incorporates some aspects of the thesis proposal I'm currently in the process of writing. However, rather than restate an as yet incomplete Theoretical Framework and Statement of Argument, I decided to use the empirical “data” of my initial exposition (which is based largely on my own direct personal observation – some of which has been previously published on my blog and/or activist publications – reading of the local press, and extensive conversations with other movement actors) to support a seemingly simple and straightforward proposition: that the movement discussed (including the phase led by university students without any permanent “union” structure) reflects a strategy of “social movement unionism” (SMU), as described by numerous authors, despite the active and open participation of cadre from specific organizations among the leadership and rank-and-file of the broader movement. This last point is important, because contrary to what seems to be the major thrust among SMU authors, I hope to argue, later in my thesis, that the view of political organizations as “external” (and therefore potentially detrimental) to movements is simply wrong. I hope to further flesh out the specific dynamics of the interaction between cadre and other participants, and between participants and state/elite actors, as well. As with the rest of my thesis, this paper is a work in progress. Suggestions and critiques will be greatly appreciated.

To Learn and to Struggle: Social Movement Unionism and Cadre Organizations in
Puerto Rico's Anti-neoliberal Education Movement¹

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Introduction

At first glance, Puerto Rico may seem an unlikely flashpoint in the global uprising in defense of public education of 2010-2011. A territorial possession of the United States since 1898, it is an enduring formal colony in a formally post-colonial world. Little-known to the outside world, its politics of resistance are often an enigma to those inside as well. “What are the Puerto Ricans doing, that they don't rebel?” asked Ramón E. Betances, patriarch of the failed 1868 independence uprising against Spain, observing from his deathbed in Parisian exile the relative quiescence that greeted occupying U.S. troops (Ojeda & Estrade 2000: 96). And yet, if answers to the proverbial “national question” were scarce during the past century, other resistances large and small have abounded, occasionally swelling into polity-wide movements that have captured international headlines and rattling the complacency of local power and shifted the limits of the possible.

At least three such sequences, over the last 15 years, have rattled the complacency of local power, catching the attention of the international media. The first was a General Strike (known as the “People's Strike”) in the midst of a three-week long strike by Puerto Rico Telephone Company (PRTC) workers against its privatization. The chronologically second was the wave of popular mobilizations set off by the accidental killing, by bombs dropped from a U.S. Navy plane, of a civilian security guard employed at the Navy Base on the inhabited island municipality of Vieques in 1999. These crucial precursors in turn served as a crucible (both in symbolic terms, and in the direct sense of the “recruitment” and practical “training” of new activists) for a third sequence, spanning two arenas, which I will examine here somewhat schematically as a single movement in defense of public

¹ An early version of this paper was presented on the “Against Austerity” panel at *Historical Materialism 8*, School of Oriental and Asian Studies, London, U.K., 12 November, 2011. I thank Nahomi Galindo Malavé, Antonio Carmona Báez, and Luis Ángel Torres Torres for their valuable comments and suggestions.

education: from the school-based grassroots movement that peaked during the Teachers' Strike of 2008, to the two-phase university students' uprising of 2010-2011. All three sequences have in common the active participation of political cadre organizations, including the Socialist Movement of Workers (MST), and its youth wing, the Union of Socialist Youths (UJS-MST), which interest me here for their particular prominence within the education movement.

Neoliberal Education

David Harvey defines neoliberalism as a primarily “*political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites,” (2005: 19) reversing the “class compromise” of the twentieth century through the privatization of public enterprises and services, among other forms of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003). Said project is driven by specific capitalist sectors linked to transnational capital and to a reconfigured, *neoliberal* state (2005: 31-36; 64-86; see also Robinson 2004; Sklair 2001), and its “dispossessed” are the working classes and other popular sectors whose access to public goods is being stripped away. One of the pillars the class compromise that is now being scaled back by the neoliberal project was universal public education. As with other public goods, the “shock” of the world financial crisis of 2008 serves as the pretext for increasing budget cuts (Klein 2008), setting off a cycle in which the slack for “failing” underfunded public institutions is picked up by ready and willing private investors.

As has been argued in the case of the U.S. (Bowles and Gintis 1976) – whose model has been explicitly emulated in Puerto Rico – educational institutions reflect the structures and rhythms of capitalist production. Thus, the twentieth-century expansion of public education served the need for an ideologically docile yet specialized labor force, in addition to accommodating some of the demands of organized popular sectors who believed it to be a source of social mobility. Louis Althusser considered the school to be the dominant ideological state apparatus (ISA) of the modern capitalist state ([1970] 1994: 118-120). According to Slavoj Žižek, however, in the most recent phase of post-1968 capitalism,

“the economy itself—the logic of market and competition—has progressively imposed itself as the hegemonic ideology. In education, we are witnessing the gradual dismantling of the classical-bourgeois school ISA: the school system is less and less the compulsory network, elevated above the market and organized directly by the state, bearer of enlightened values... On behalf of the sacred formula of ‘lower costs, higher efficiency’, it is progressively penetrated by different forms of PPP, or public–private partnership,” (2010: 91).

At the elementary and secondary school level, the preferred form of PPP in the U.S. has been the so-called Charter School, explicitly pursued by the federal government under both the Bush administration's “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) policy and the Obama administration's “Race to the Top” (RTTT) policy, which aggressively pursue charter schools by making certain educational funds available only to those states and territories (including Puerto Rico) that pass laws implementing them. Celebrated as the panacea for the country's educational woes by figures across the U.S. political spectrum (even though in repeated studies, they have failed to perform any better – and very often perform worse – than traditional schools, even by the flawed “measure” of standardized test scores; Russom 2012: 129), charter schools are publicly funded, but controlled by private institutions or individuals. These include, in some states, for-profit companies known as Educational Management Organization (EMOs), which constitute about a quarter of the total (Russom 2012: 127), hedge fund managers, who also invest in “non-profit” charter schools (132), and foundations headed by well-known, super-wealthy families like the Gateses, Waltons, and Broads (110).

The panorama is not much different at the university level, where the focus has been on streamlining the student population (through tuition hikes, for example) and producing only research “useful” to the market (see Slaughter and Rhoads 2009). Žižek reminds us that such policies respond not only to a logic of greater profit, but also “to the process of enclosing the commons of intellectual products, of privatizing general intellect,” (2010: 91). With the elimination of studies not oriented towards “solving society’s concrete problems,” which are consistently the target of cuts, “what

disappears... is the true task of thinking: not only to offer solutions to problems posed by ‘society’—in reality, state and capital—but to reflect on the very form of these problems; to discern a problem in the very way we perceive a problem,” (90). This is why the growing privatization of education represents not only its commodification, but “is itself part of a global transformation in the mode of ideological interpellation,” (91).

Neoliberal privatization everywhere in the world shifts the spatial locus of class struggle from the shop floor to other, non-traditional areas of struggle, including the demand for and defense of public services (see Eckstein [1989] 2001). Furthermore, neoliberalization deepens the process Karl Marx called “real subsumption”, leading to the heightened importance of what some have termed immaterial labor (such as that of educators) within the capitalist process of production (see Hardt and Negri 2000; 2005). This, however, does not necessarily mean that the role of labor organizations will disappear. To the extent that, as Harvey has recently argued, “the struggle is likely to be between public-sector workers and the state apparatus,” it’s likely that teachers’ unions (as recent events in Chicago and elsewhere seem to indicate) will take the lead (2010). Students have also been crucial in recent protests, especially at the university level (see Solomon & Palmieri 2011), but to the extent that those struggles confront capital and defend *access* to the commons of education, working-class students and especially student workers (including graduate students) will continue to be crucial.

The Dynamics of Social Movement Unionism

The stage would thus seem to be set wherever neoliberal educational policies are implemented. However, we know that oppositional movements, in education as in other arenas, don’t always emerge, nor do they do so with the same intensity, aims, or levels of “success”. Context and structure may offer necessary conditions, but is never in itself sufficient. Social movement studies over the past decade or so have shifted focus from what was once called the “political opportunity structure” to the *dynamics* of contention (MacAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001; Aminzade, et al. 2001; Tilly 2003). Thus, rather than

seeking vaguely conceptualized and all-too easily stretchable “opportunities” within the context itself, scholars have begun to look for how actors (or “players”) *create* opportunities, especially through their interaction with each other, with non-movement (including state and elite) actors, and with the structure itself (Jasper & Goodwin 2011). “Actor-centered” elements, such as strategy, leadership, organization, identities, and emotions, are now seen as neither entirely independent nor dependent on the “structure” (Gould 2009; Ganz 2009; Meyer, Whittier & Robnett 2002; Goodwin, Jasper & Polleta 2001).

Although there are key studies on the importance of strategic leadership for movement success (Ganz 2009) and the collective dynamics used to recruit and sustain participation in diverse movements (Hirsch 1990; Whittier 1995), one area of movement dynamics that seems to have been understudied (at least since the heyday of “resource mobilization” theories and its critics; see McCarthy & Zald 1977; Piven & Cloward 1979), with notable exceptions (Boudreau 2001; Rutten 2008), is the interaction between organized and “unorganized” movement participants. One such exception is the area of organized labor, where a particular form of strategy and organizing known as *social movement unionism* has been widely discussed and studied since the 1990s, particularly in reference to public-sector labor opposition to neoliberalism in the periphery of the world system (Compton & Weiner 2008; Barchiesi 2007; Scipes 1992). Kim Scipes has distinguished social movement unions (SMUs) from both traditional “economic” union leaderships that see themselves exclusively as service-providers and guardians of members' shop-floor rights and benefits restrained by the purview of legal collective-bargaining frameworks, as well as from (traditionally left-wing) “political” unions controlled by external political parties (1992: 86).

By contrast, SMUs are said to be characterized by having independent, democratic rank-and-file control and forging coalitions with “community” actors affected by neoliberal policies beyond the work place (Scipes 1992: 86-87). In practice, relationships between leftist political organizations and social movements of any sort are seldom clear cut. Individual members, both among the leadership and the rank-and-file may belong to one or more specific organizations. Furthermore, political organizations –

particularly those that define themselves as “revolutionary” – may explicitly seek to build relationships with, and even influence broader social movement organizations (SMOs), including unions, without “controlling” them (Alcañiz and Scheier 2007). Scipes himself denies control by the Communist Party of the Philippines over the labor union umbrella he holds up as an exemplary SMU, the Philippine *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU), despite the probable high presence of CP cadre among the KMU rank-and-file and leadership (1992: 92-95).

In the following sections, I will describe of the deployment of the neoliberal class project in the context of Puerto Rico's dependent capitalism, followed by a schematic narrative of the sequence, from the early 2000's to 2011 that I refer to as the movement in defense of public education in Puerto Rico. Rather than attempt to gauge or explain the movement's “successes” (which is difficult in part because it is arguably ongoing, and in part because there are definite gains, from the point of view of many participants, which don't necessarily constitute successes from the point of view of explicit demands), I will limit myself here to making the argument that the movement represents an instance of SMU strategy, despite the active presence of organized cadre among the rank-and-file and leadership. The exact dynamics of cadre-mass interaction, and/or the effect it may have had on movement emergence and success or failure, are questions left open for future research.

The Making of a Neoliberal Colony

Ramón Grosfoguel (2003), among others, has identified the mode of domination prevalent in Puerto Rico as well as other dependent territories in the Caribbean and elsewhere, as “modern colonialism”, characterized less by direct repression and extraction of raw materials typical of classical colonialism than by the attempt to rule with the “consent” of the colonized, by stimulating dependent development and greater local autonomy. Emerging in the 1940s, with the reshuffling of colonial and metropolitan elites, the new colonial modality marked a strategic shift from primarily military considerations to the symbolic battlefield of the Cold War (Grosfoguel 2003: 45-46). This new terrain demanded the

construction of an “exemplary” showcase of capitalism and polyarchy² in the Caribbean, an imperative that grew more urgent after the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

On the political field, the shift was manifested in the authorization, by the U.S. Congress, for the drafting of a new colonial Constitution, ratified by popular referendum, and finally approved with amendments by Congress, which came into effect in 1952. The new Constitution proclaimed the “Free Associated State” or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, although it was made abundantly clear by U.S. authorities, throughout the process and after, that it did not represent a change in the territorial relationship (Rivera Ramos 2007). From that moment on, the “status issue” would hegemonize electoral politics, with the three main political parties that have consistently participated in all elections since then “representing” each of the status “options” – the *status quo* Commonwealth, annexation to the U.S. as a state of the Union, or independence. On the economic field, the model that emerged was dubbed “industrialization by invitation”, an export-oriented strategy based on attracting U.S. capital through tax exemptions, a laboratory of what later would become neoliberal globalization.³ These developments were framed within the populist, modernizing discourse of the PPD, which governed until 1968. Within this framework, public education was privileged as the motor of modernization, and enshrined as such in the 1952 Constitution (Laguarta Ramírez [Unpub.]: 3-4).

The experiment was initially projected as a success, with accelerated improvement of living standards (although it is important to recall the role played by massive emigration to the U.S. in from the 1940s to the 1960s, as an escape valve). However, from 1973 onwards, the model entered a phase of terminal stagnation that persists today: poverty levels, which had decreased rapidly and steadily over the previous two decades, bottomed out at around 50% (thanks in part to a steady injection of federal

² Following William I. Robinson, I use the term in distinction to democracy: “...the polyarchic definition of democracy is equated with the stability of the capitalist social order. By definitional fiat, power is exercised in the general welfare and any attempt to change the social order is a pathological challenge to democracy... Therefore, the notion that there may be a veritable contradiction in terms between elite or class rule, on the one hand, and democracy, does not enter... into the polyarchic definition. In contrast, I am arguing that polyarchy as a distinct form of elite rule performs the function of legitimating existing inequalities, and does so more effectively than authoritarianism,” (1996: 51).

³ See for example Dietz & Pantojas García, 1993.

income-supplementing aid), while unemployment fluctuated between 10 and 17% of the economically active workforce (Dietz 2003: 8-9, 164-168) – a number which rises dramatically if we factor in Puerto Rico's workforce participation rate of merely 41%, one of the lowest in the world (Malavé 2011). After 1976, the model acquired the characteristics that defined it through the century's end: federal tax exemptions on repatriated profits for U.S. corporations operating in Puerto Rico, and an increasing flow of federal funds to both government agencies and individuals. This strategy primarily attracted capital-intensive pharmaceutical companies (Carmona Báez 2007), while government absorbed the shortfall in private-sector employment. Stimulated by public assistance and the relatively high wages of a, highly-skilled middle class, growing consumption generated a mushrooming financial and service sector, offset by the corresponding decline of all productive sectors (Dietz 2003).

The neoliberal offensive had arrived for good in Puerto Rico by the late 1980s, when a standard neoliberal development strategy was drawn up by an “advisory council” composed of bank C.E.O.s, private-sector “consultants”, and high government functionaries with close ties to the private sector, calling for the implementation of “austerity” measures, and identifying specific public services suited for privatization, including education, public hospitals, the PRTC, the water company, and the electric company, among others (CAEG, 1989). In 1991, the PRTC went up for sale, provoking massive protests, but failed to attract potential buyers. By 1998, however, streamlined through partial privatizations, and despite the massive impact of the People's Strike, the PRTC was sold off to GTE Corp., among other buyers, including Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, a powerful local bank, and one of the most proactive proponents of privatization (Carmona Báez 2004: 254).

Between 1991 and 2008, the state-owned cargo shipping company, all of the public hospitals and most of the clinics, a coal-based power plant, the administration of the public water works, and a newly-built bridge connecting the airport with the financial district, were among the assets privatized by both PPD and PNP governments. Tariffs and other corporate taxes were significantly reduced throughout this period as well. In 2005, during the PPD administration of Aníbal Acevedo-Vilá, U.S.-

based credit agencies threatened to downgrade Puerto Rico's bonds to junk status if the government failed to take austerity measures to pay back its public debt. A stand-off between the governor and the local legislature (controlled by the PNP) during the annual budget approval resulted in a two-week government shut-down – leaving 200,000 public employees temporarily jobless – served as leverage to push through a highly unpopular sales tax, one of several proposed austerity measures. The government also stalled contract negotiations with public-sector unions and attempted, unsuccessfully, to implement charter schools (one of the reasons for the 2008 teachers' strike).

In 2008, the right-wing conservative candidate Luis Fortuño, of the PNP (also a member of the U.S. Republican Party) swept into office, and his party took control of the legislature. One of the Fortuño administration's very first measures was to approve the notorious Law 7, which allowed it to override labor legislation and public-sector contracts for a period of two years, laying off 30,000 public-sector workers (around 17% of the public workforce). Parallel legislation also authorized the incursion of private capital in the public-sector, through “Public-Private Alliances” (PPAs) – the local name for what Žižek calls PPPs. With the marked exception of the Federation of Teachers (FMPR)⁴ and a handful of other militant public-sector unions, the labor movement, which endorsed the PPD's imposition of the sales tax in 2005, also acquiesced to the PNP's more overtly neoliberal agenda, often “constrained” into a cost-benefit logic of trading off membership numbers for holding on to whatever quantity of dues can be salvaged.

*The Public School Teachers' Strike of 2008*⁵

The possibility of privatizing at least part of the public education system had been on the agenda of Puerto Rico's ruling classes since at least the late 1980s. Although the public financing of private education is expressly forbidden by the Commonwealth Constitution, by 1993, the administration of

⁴ The FMPR was founded in 1966, as a rank-and-file alternative to the management-based Association of Teachers (AMPR), which had been a crucial conduit for the Commonwealth government's early education policies, and by the 1960s was mainly led by directors and supervisors, and by and large considered the PPD's “labor” wing in the public schools.

⁵ Unless noted otherwise, the content of the following three sections is based on personal participant observation.

then governor Pedro Rosselló, of the PNP,, approved an educational reform law that, among other things, would implement a “voucher” system through which the government would pay for private school tuition for “talented” public school students. That initiative set off a joint strike of all the teachers' unions, which pressured legislators into amending the law lasted only one day. Eventually, the local Supreme Court, then controlled by the PPD, ruled the vouchers unconstitutional (Neptune Rivera, 1995).⁶ Radical sectors within the FMPR, however, continued to agitate against the perils of a new modality of privatization being promoted in the U.S. Implementing charter schools, they argued, had been one of the true aims of the reform law, temporarily delayed by the strike's effective pressure on legislators.⁷

Although teacher strikes were now illegal, one-day school strikes around local issues, often with the support or even initiative of parents, students, and neighboring communities, became increasingly common in the early 2000s. By 2006, the Puerto Rican government was openly touting charter schools as one means of reforming public education, in line with the U.S. government policy under NCLB and RTTT. The FMPR, was now led by the radical platform “Commitment, Democracy, and Militancy” (CODEMI), which had recently won its second union elections since 2003, and many of whose members (not all), including President Rafael Feliciano, were also outspoken members of the MST. Having accomplished the long-standing unfulfilled promise of previous leaderships to leave the conservative AFL-CIO's American Federation of Teachers, the FMPR began to prepare its rank-and-file of over 30,000 for the eventuality of a strike to stop the implementation of charter schools, among other demands. This possibility posed serious risks for the union; Law 45, passed in 1998, which “allowed” public-sector workers to bargain collectively, but forbade strikes, punishing them with “decertification”

⁶ Among the post-strike amendments to Puerto Rico's reform law, legislators clarified ambiguous references to “free” (rather than “public”) education, as well as all references to private schools, and re-emphasized the public nature of the “community school” model being created (Neptune Rivera 1995: 234).

⁷ Personal communication with Luis Ángel Torres Torres, current FMPR Secretary of Labor Education, 8 November, 2011. Although the NCLB and RTTT were still years in the future, charter schools were very much in the air. First proposed in 1988 (and quickly embraced by U.S. economic unions like the AFL-CIO), charter schools had found their way into Minnesota state legislation by 1991, and the Clinton administration began offering federal funds to charters in 1994. By fall 2001, there were 2,300 charter schools with half a million students throughout the U.S. (Russom 2012: 118).

(the loss of exclusive representative status, and with it, membership dues).⁸

However, the government's stalling of contract negotiations for over two years, combined with the rapidly deteriorating conditions of many schools due to government negligence and mismanagement, put the option on the table when, on November 11, 2007, a General Assembly of over 7200 teachers – an unprecedented number – unanimously ratified a previous vote by the Delegates' Assembly to authorize a strike. The Department of Education's immediate response was to file a request before the regulating board to decertify the FMPR for merely approving the strike, which had no set date as of yet. The Board complied, but this did not deter the teachers' determination. On February 17, 25,000 teachers marched to the governor's mansion, demanding a contract. This brought the Department of Education back to the negotiation table, where several important unofficial concessions were made, including a pay raise and the promise not to pursue charter schools. However, an impasse was soon reached over contract demands related to working conditions. The strike began on February 21.

The Teachers' Strike of 2008 lasted 2 weeks (10 working days). Over 20,000 teachers, librarians, and counselors, over half the total, supported the strike by staying home in the first days, and over 8,000 actively defended picket lines at 850 out of a total 1500 schools throughout Puerto Rico. Many more indirectly supported the strike in different ways. Parents supported by keeping their children home from school throughout the duration of the strike. A coalition of over 70 labor, community, religious, and political organizations was formed to support the strike. Within a space of 7 days, 4 massive marches were held, mobilizing thousands of teachers. The onslaught of repression and

⁸ By 1998, U.S.-based “international” unions, influential in both the federal Clinton administration and the Puerto Rican government, led the push to approve Law 45, which allowed public-sector labor organizations to become full-fledged “unions” (in U.S. labor law parlance, to vie for exclusive representation of a bargaining unit through elections, and to receive union dues directly “checked off” from members' wages by the employer). Law 45 was touted as a great victory, although the exact number of workers “unionized” was already organized in existing labor organizations such as the FMPR. In effect, Law 45 banned public-sector strikes, where striking public employees previously faced only difficult-to-enforce, individual legal or disciplinary measures (Rosado Marzán 2007). After much debate, the FMPR decided to make an electoral bid for representation all of the public school employees, routing the AMPR. This catapulted the FMPR to a position of leadership over the entire 40,000-strong body of non-managerial workers in the public school system, technically becoming the largest single labor organization in the Caribbean outside of Cuba.

propaganda against the FMPR was also intense. A massive deployment of police, including the riot squad, was deployed to repress teachers defending the picket lines. At the more combative schools, police vans were used to bus in scabs. Several former FMPR members joined up with leaders of the panicked Law 45 unions to demand an end to the strike. Red-baiting in the media was rampant. By the second week, picket lines began to wear down.⁹

On March 5, a second assembly of over 10,000 teachers, in high spirits, voted to temporarily suspend the strike. There has been some debate about the timeliness of the strike, its success or failure, and its impact on the teachers. The FMPR remains decertified as a result of the strike, which means public school teachers currently have no exclusive representative, and no contract. However, although far from a total victory, it should be kept in mind that the strike was able to secure from the Department of Education a memorandum which put in writing the verbal concessions made during negotiations in the days prior to the strike, including an immediate pay raise, and the public disavowal of charter schools (to this day, there are no charter schools in Puerto Rico). In addition, and despite many difficulties, including a recent internal schism, the FMPR clearly remains the reference among teachers for commitment to struggle. Since the strike, it defeated an attempt by the powerful U.S.-based international, SEIU, to take over the teachers' bargaining unit (Rosado Marzán 2009), and has staged two successful 24-hour strikes of the entire public school system.¹⁰ FMPR locals continue to hold or support strikes around school or community issues.

The University Student uprising of 2010-2011: Phase 1

On April 13, 2010, a General Assembly of the student body at the University of Puerto Rico's main campus in Río Piedras voted to approve a 48-hour campus occupation the following week, to be

⁹ See Torres Torres 2009. The numbers cited by the FMPR for the first days of the strike correspond with those given by police, according to union officials. Personal communication with Luis Ángel Torres Torres, 8 November, 2011.

¹⁰ On October 15, 2009, and August 26, 2010. The former was on the day of a “General Strike” against Law 7, in which only the FMPR and a handful of other unions actually struck. The FMPR mobilized 10,000 teachers to the rally held at Puerto Rico's largest shopping mall (owned by one of the most notorious supporters of Law 7 and the Fortuño government), between one sixth and one eighth of the total attendance. The latter provoked reprisals the current administration's Department of Education, which fired the entire FMPR leadership from their school posts, and stopped the dues checkoff that the FMPR had secured on a voluntary basis.

immediately followed by an “indefinite strike” if the UPR administration refused to negotiate. The proposal had been raised by members of the UJS-MST, and fiercely resisted by some members of other student organizations, who would later support the strike. The students' main demands were fiscal transparency, a stop to summer term tuition hikes, and the repeal of a certification by the Board of Trustees that eliminated tuition exemptions for honor students, athletes, and university employees and their families. The occupation began in the pre-dawn hours of April 21, as hundreds of students chained shut the seven vehicular access gates to the campus, and became a full-fledged strike at midnight of the following day. The campus was immediately surrounded by hundreds of police. Thus ended a relative five-year lull in on-campus conflict.¹¹

A 30-day strike in the Spring of 2005 over tuition hikes had ended in a stalemate, with the previous administration agreeing to a multi-sector review of university finances. However, a gradual hike was instituted two years later, despite the recommendations of the review committee. That defeat had signified a general demoralization of the student body, despite occasional flashes of revival. Nonetheless, that experience also generated a crop of new student leaders. In contrast to 2005, when a rudderless student body essentially scrambled to respond to the tuition hike, the 2010 strike was preceded by at least two years of continuous agitation by the organized student left, including the UJS-MST, and informative and deliberative processes through which the participative organisms that served as the backbone of the strike were built.

As is common in many parts of the world, and particularly Latin America, the UPR has long been considered a “hotbed” of radicalism, even if its reputation has been greatly exaggerated. In the 1960s and 1970s, the expansion of public education translated into the entry of thousands of working-class students into the university. If student activism, revolving to a great extent around selective service for the Vietnam War and ROTC presence on campus, had been dominated by nationalist and anti-imperialist discourse, class and economic concerns had come to the fore by the end of the 1970s.

¹¹ This section summarizes events observed first hand and described in greater detail in Laguarda Ramírez 2010 and 2011a.

The legendary, largely unsuccessful, three-month student strike of 1981, which resulted in hundreds of expulsions, and – like previous strikes – included armed confrontations between students and police, was the first large campus conflict to revolve almost exclusively around tuition hikes (Picó, et al. 1982). Many of the parents and professors who supported the 2010 strike were veterans of 1981.

One of the results of the 1981 strike was the adoption, by university administrators, of an unofficial policy of not requesting police intervention to resolve on-campus conflicts, which was observed by subsequent administrators. During the first phase of the 2010-2011 student uprising, the policy just barely held ground. Administrators refused to meet with student negotiators elected by the Assembly, and police presence at campus entrances was maintained. In addition, the administration formally canceled classes, effectively implementing a lockout in the hopes of wearing down the occupying students. A few weeks into the stand-off, police posted at the campus gates refused to allow the entrance of food or water, which had the unintended side effect of galvanizing public opinion in favor of the students, forcing a relaxation of the restriction, which ebbed and flowed henceforth. However, selective police violence against students and supporters attempting to join the occupiers resulted in press coverage favorable to the students.

Crowds of supporters formed at the main gate each day. The professors' and employees' unions refused to enter the campus. Eventually, the Board of Trustees agreed to meet with student negotiators, but refused to concede any demands. Gradually, other UPR campuses – less renown for their student militancy – struck as well, eventually turning the conflict into the first system-wide strike in the institution's history. Labor unions and other “civil society” groups set up vigil outside the campus. Several large-scale support demonstrations held at the campus gates drew thousands of supporters, as did marches from the campus to the off-campus UPR Central Office. Eventually, consensus within the Board of Trustees was broken, and a bare majority agreed to all of the students' main demands on June 16. The Board also agreed not to pursue reprisals against any of the students who participated in the strike. A student Assembly held on June 21 ratified the agreements, officially ended the occupation and

strike. It was the most complete partial student victory in the UPR's history.

The University Student uprising of 2010-2011: Phase 2

Over the course of the negotiations, the administration's plans to implement an across-the-board \$800 “special fee” during the following semester, which in effect more than doubled tuition for undergraduates, were discovered. One of the agreements that ended the strike was that administrators would not implement the fee immediately, and that the students stipulated their opposition to the eventual imposition of any additional fees or tuition hikes. Although it was generally understood that administrators would attempt to implement the fee at the start of the following semester, in January of 2011, there was also a broad consensus that the student movement needed time to regroup in order to build an effective opposition to those plans, among both the student body and the general public. The moment to mount that opposition came in early December, when another student General Assembly at Río Piedras responded to the administration's formal announcement of the fee by declaring a 48-hour strike, to be followed by a new indefinite strike one week later if plans persisted.¹²

This second phase offered a far more complex scenario than the first, from the offset. For one thing, it was limited by and large to the Río Piedras campus. The students were also unable to occupy the campus, as they had during the first phase. The first 48-hour period was marked by intense violence between the students and the administration's hired thugs.¹³ Once the full-fledged strike kicked off on December 15, student strikers encountered a campus pre-emptively occupied by police, there to enforce a ban of all campus protests by the administration. The policy of police non-intervention in place since 1981 had disintegrated. Also, unlike during the first phase of the uprising, classes remained scheduled. The professors' and employees' unions, once again, refused to cross picket lines, but some professors held class on campus, setting off wild melees between riot police and students attempting to enforce the strike by disrupting class.

¹² This section summarizes events described, in part, in Laguarda 2011b.

¹³ Many of whom were youth from poor areas with no formal training, recruited for the job through Internet social networks by a private security firm.

After a brief respite over the end-of-year vacation break, the students switched gears, in late January to a strategy of non-violent civil disobedience at the campus entrances, to which police responded by applying intense pressure on demonstrators' heads, necks, and faces in order to arrest them. Sexual harassment and groping of female students by police during arrests were also documented. Marches and other outreach efforts in neighboring poor communities were held to generate support and awareness. On February 8, a verbal confrontation between police and students painting protest slogans on a stretch of side-walk inside the campus, escalated into a full-scale police riot that was caught on camera by the press, provoking a massive public outcry. The professors' and employees' unions immediately declared a 24-hour sympathy strike. Three days later, on the same day as Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, UPR President José Ramón de la Torre resigned. A march in support of the students, programmed for the following day, drew several tens of thousands.

The Police were withdrawn from campus, but were redeployed shortly, in response to ongoing student agitation. Despite having generated broad public sympathy, the passage of time and constant confrontation and repression were beginning to wear out the strikers. On February 22, a student Assembly voted to suspend the strike temporarily. Although mobilizations and confrontations continued for a few weeks, the second phase of the 2010-2011 student uprising had already fizzled out, but not before legislators agreed to create a “special scholarship fund” for students who could not afford the hike. The “special fee” remains in place, although five of the six candidates running in the upcoming November 6 general elections (all except Governor Fortuño) have pledged to eliminate it if elected into office.

Conclusions

PPPs (or PPAs) have represented one of the main neoliberal privatization strategies in Puerto Rico during recent years, and how charter schools are one of the earliest and most visible modalities pursued by the government and the ruling class. The elimination of courses and departments not oriented

towards the production of expert knowledge aimed at “solving society's concrete problems” (the arts and physical education in the public schools, the Hispanic Studies Department at the UPR – among others that have suffered dramatic cuts) has been prominent as well. In this sense, Puerto Rico illustrates Žižek's thesis: the privileged place of education as the dominant ISA during the era of the PPD's modernizing hegemony (1940-1968), as evidenced by its centrality among rights guaranteed by the 1952 Constitution, is being undermined and replaced by *the “economy” itself* – “the sacred formula of ‘lower costs, higher efficiency’,” – as the dominant ISA.¹⁴

The Puerto Rican experience of the last fifteen years also highlights the importance that each struggle has for the development of future struggles. To wit: FMPR teachers (including MST members) were key participants of the 1998 People's Strike;¹⁵ this experience served to lay the groundwork for their participation in the movement to oust the U.S. Navy from Vieques (one of the civil disobedience “camps” within the target range was set up by the FMPR; the MST, for its part, played a key role in less-publicized disruptive activities), which was sparked the following year; both experiences, as well as the two previous FMPR strikes (1974 and 1993), nurtured the leadership that served during the 2008 strike; in turn, many UPR students participated actively in support of that strike (especially future teachers and UJS-MST members), which together with the 2005 UPR strike experience, served as a classroom for the 2010-2011 student uprising.

Organized cadre not only participated actively in Puerto Rico's antineoliberal education movement, they were elected into leadership positions of movement SMOs and other representative organisms as publicly-known and outspoken cadre. However, at no point did MST or UJS-MST

¹⁴ “Quite logically, insofar as the economy is considered the sphere of non-ideology, this brave new world of global commodification considers itself post-ideological. The ISAs are, of course, still here; more than ever. Yet insofar as, in its self-perception, ideology is located in subjects, in contrast to pre-ideological individuals, this hegemony of the economic sphere cannot but appear as the absence of ideology. What this means is not that ideology simply ‘reflects’ the economy, as superstructure to its base. Rather, the economy functions here as an ideological model itself, so that we are fully justified in saying that it is operative as an ISA—in contrast to ‘real’ economic life, which definitely does not follow the idealized liberal-market model,” (Žižek 2010: 92).

¹⁵ See for example Conferencia Sindical 2000. Because the strike took place over the summer, thousands of teachers were free to demonstrate where and whenever they were needed. During the actual two-day general strike, they shut down the Department of Education's offices, physically enforcing their picket line, and maintained a strong, visible presence at pickets, marches, and rallies throughout the phone workers' entire three-week standoff.

members “control” the movement, even when occupying leadership positions. Whatever may be said about members' interest in *influencing* movement decisions, no major decisions were taken through anything other than democratic processes within rank-and-file bodies. In addition, during both the school and the university strikes, concerted outreach to local communities – often long pre-existing – and linking of sectoral and community demands were part of the broader movement strategy, actively supported by participating cadre organizations.

Therefore, the FMPR clearly fits Scipes's definition of an SMU, and more generally, Puerto Rico's movement in defense of public education reflects SMU organizing and strategy on the part of both organized and unorganized participants. This dynamic is not adversely affected by the active presence of organized political cadre or their pursuit of explicitly political goals within the broader movement and SMOs. Unlike what Scipes at times seems to imply, organized cadre were never “external” to Puerto Rico's education movement, but an organic part of it. Indeed, they may have been decisive for the movement's very emergence, although this, as well as the impact of their participation and interaction with other participants on movement strategy, tactics, and outcomes, remains open to further research.

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