



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

University of Puerto Rico students strike to resist budget cuts, 2010

April 21,

2010

to: June 21,

2010

Country: Puerto Rico

Location Description: *Mainly the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico*

Goals:

The striking students wanted the University of Puerto Rico to rescind Certification 98 (C98), which was going to suspend many tuition exemptions and set the University on the path to becoming private. The students also wished to prevent any potential tuition increases proposed by the university.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals › Blog
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals › Blog
- 011. Records, radio, and television › Students created their own radio station
- 013. Deputations
- 015. Group lobbying
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals › Blog
- 011. Records, radio, and television › Students created their own radio station
- 038. Marches

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 4th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals › Blog
- 011. Records, radio, and television › Students created their own radio station
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals › Blog
- 011. Records, radio, and television › Students created their own radio station
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals › Blog
- 011. Records, radio, and television › Students created their own radio station
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 062. Student strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- University students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

General Student Council of the Rio Piedras campus, which organized two General Assemblies of Students, voted to create

the Student Negotiating Committee, and voted to stage the 48 hour strike, which later turned into the indefinite student strike.

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Members of the local community often brought food and water to the striking students.

Members of the faculty voiced their support for the students; some participated in interviews

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Faculty members
- Local community members

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 10 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The University of Puerto Rico Administration, Governor Fortuño

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

The opponent shut down the school to try to stop the protests

Campaigner violence:

On April 21st some students exchanged blows with two security guards

Repressive Violence:

On April 21st, two security guards exchanged blows with students and one sprayed the crowd with pepper spray. Due to strong winds, the pepper spray was carried over to the officers and left some of them disoriented. There were also reports of police blocking people from delivering food and water to the students occupying the gates.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The strike forced the University of Puerto Rico to meet with the student negotiators. Fortunately for the students, the two

parties reached an agreement that addressed all of their goals, except the one to stop any increases in tuition. Here are the components of that finalized agreement: that tuition waivers for athletes, artists, honor students, and employees and their families will be preserved; that no campus of the UPR system will be privatized in part or in whole; that any tuition increase would not begin in August of 2010; that students will be protected from facing charges for participating in the strike.

The strike lasted 62 days and survived pressure from the university, the governor of Puerto Rico, and the local police.

The strike spread to all of the 11 campuses of UPR and won the support of faculty, local workers, and parents.

Luis Fortuño was elected Governor of Puerto Rico and sworn in on January 2, 2009. Two months into his term, Fortuño announced his plan to repair Puerto Rico's struggling economy. He called for severe budget cuts, which some speculated would result in the laying off of over 30,000 government employees. Fortuño's economic plan would be met with much resistance from workers, teachers, and students. In May, workers organized a march to San Juan in protest against the plans. In October, workers organized a general strike to protest these same budget cuts. Later in August of 2010, teachers organized a walkout protest. It wouldn't be long before the high level of discontent precipitated a response from students at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), which introduced large budget cuts of its own that spawned from Fortuño's plan.

UPR's Board of Trustees designed the university's proposal for budget cuts. This plan, known as Certification 98 (C98), called for the removal of many tuition exemptions for honor students, athletes, artists, employees, and their families. There were also other undisclosed plans that may have transitioned UPR from being a public university to a private institution. Historically, the University of Puerto Rico had always been a public institution; it has 11 campuses across the island and serves about 65,000 students, between 60% and 75% of which come from families living below the poverty line.

On the 13th of April, the General Student Council of the Rio Piedras campus called a General Assembly of Students. The Rio Piedras campus is considered the main campus of the eleven total. At the assembly, students discussed the impending budget cuts. By the end of the assembly, the students voted to create a Student Negotiating Committee (SNC) that would deal directly with the university to express the concerns of the students and work to find solutions. Additionally, the students overwhelmingly voted to stage a 48-hour strike starting on the 21st of April. The main goal of the strike was to provoke UPR to revoke C98 and thus preserve the various tuition exemptions and the public status of the university. During the 48-hour strike, students established a blog at a domain donated by an alumnus.

Prior to the strike, the SNC tried to meet with Jose Ramon de la Torre, the president of UPR, and its Board of Trustees. The SNC also tried meeting with other leaders and administrators of the university; all requests were denied and so the strike continued as planned.

The student strike officially began around 3 a.m. when multiple students began to organize on the Rio Piedras campus. Within the next three hours, the students seized control of all of the campus's many gates, except the one belonging to the campus's security office. A meeting was later scheduled between the SNC and the Chancellor of UPR, Ana R. Guadalupe, at 3 p.m. The two sides were unable to meet, however, due to rumors that local police would be entering the campus at around the same time. Sometime between 9 and 10 p.m., the Chancellor decided to shut the campus down; she claimed that nineteen security officers had been injured in a clash with students. Local newspapers would later invalidate her claim, reporting that there had been a struggle between two officers and some students at the gate and that one of the officers used pepper spray against the students. Other officers were then exposed to the pepper spray. During this tense period, the SNC continued its attempts to secure a meeting with the administration of UPR, but was repeatedly unsuccessful. Consequently, the 48-hour strike would turn into an indefinite strike.

The indefinite strike began on the 23rd of April. With the campus shut down, there were no classes going on so most students and faculty left. 200 strikers remained on the Rio Piedras campus; they camped inside the campus near the gates and prevented classes from opening up. The strike quickly spread to the other 10 campuses of the University of Puerto Rico. On the 2nd of May, students at the Rio Piedras campus started to broadcast their own radio station, Radio Huelga. On the 5th of May, students

staged a demonstration, complete with signs, in front of the office of a trustee. Two days later, 5,000 students from all 11 campuses marched to the office of the president to demand that he sit down with the students and negotiate.

In response to the march, the SNC was able to reach a provisional agreement with the university's president and its Board of Administrators. Further discussions about the agreement began the following day. Stipulations of the agreement involved rewriting C98 in order to preserve tuition exemptions and the university's public status. The students also wanted assurance that there would be no tuition increase in the immediate future.

On the 13th of May, the General Student Council of the Rio Piedras campus called a second General Assembly of Students. The SNC presented the details of the agreement to the almost 3,000 students in attendance. The SNC then recommended continuing the strike, which was met with some opposition; a local newspaper reported about 100 students in attendance voted against the strike. A student by the name of Carlos Collazo contributed the following argument to the assembly, "The time has come to decide whether the strike has served its purpose already. Let's study and at the same time continue fighting for our benefits." The remaining students voted for the strike, however, and a march to San Juan followed the proceedings.

The next day, a large police force was sent to the campus at Rio Piedras. There, police blocked the arrival of food and water. Many parents brought food and water to deliver to their sons and daughters that were occupying the gates, but the police actually arrested some parents for their attempts to smuggle food and water into the campus. Soon after the incident, the chief of police ordered a reduction in the number of police officers stationed at the campus and afterwards, food and water were once again allowed. Days later, on the 23rd of May, the university agreed to preserve the tuition exemptions for honor students, athletes, artists, employees, and their families. The strike continued, however, to press for other concessions from the university, including a promise not to increase tuition.

Governor Fortuño's economic plan included a proposed \$1,200 increase in tuition at the University of Puerto Rico. Fortuño adamantly opposed the strike from the start and ordered the students to end the strike on the 7th of June. Instead, the students refused and continued to strike. Nine days later, the students were rewarded for their persistence when a final agreement was reached between the students and the Board of Trustees. The final agreement preserved the tuition exemptions, preserved UPR's status as public, and protected students from facing charges for any incidents that took place during the strike. One issue not addressed in the final agreement was the students' concerns regarding an increase in tuition. Instead, the university hinted at a potential tuition increase for January 2011.

A National Student Assembly, consisting of students from all 11 campuses, was held on the 21st of June to vote on the agreement and it was approved. The strike then reached a conclusion, after 62 days. Both the student body and faculty considered the final agreement a victory.

Research Notes

Sources:

Cave, Damien. "Students Gain After Strike In Puerto Rico." *The New York Times*, 18 June 2010.

Gonzalez, Juan. "Ugly Showdown Seems Probable in Puerto Rico as Student Strike Paralyzes University." *New York Daily News*, 9 June 2010.

Hernandez, Juan A. "Student Strike Shuts Down UPR." *Puerto Rico Daily Sun*, 22 April 2010.

----. "UPR Student Strike Regains Momentum." *Puerto Rico Daily Sun*, 14 May 2010.

Joubert-Ceci, Berta. "Student Strike Stops Brutal Cuts at UPR." *Workers World*, 13 May 2010.

Robles, Frances. "Student Strike Puts a Spotlight on Island's Rolling Dicontent." *The Miami Herald*, 24 May 2010.

Sosa Pascual, Omayra and Emma Graves Fitzsimmons. "Student Protests Tie Up Campuses In Puerto Rico." The New York Times, 21 May 2010.

Sosa Pascual, Omayra and Frances Robles. "Deal Reached to End Strike." The Miami Herald, 18 June 2010.

Additional Notes:

There are rumors that another strike may be organized at the Rio Piedras campus if and when the university increases the tuition.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (02/06/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Julio Alicea, 07/11/2011

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/15/2019 - 01:32): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/university-puerto-rico-students-strike-resist-budget-cuts-2010>

Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-people-color>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-student-participants>