

PUERTO RICO Daily Sun



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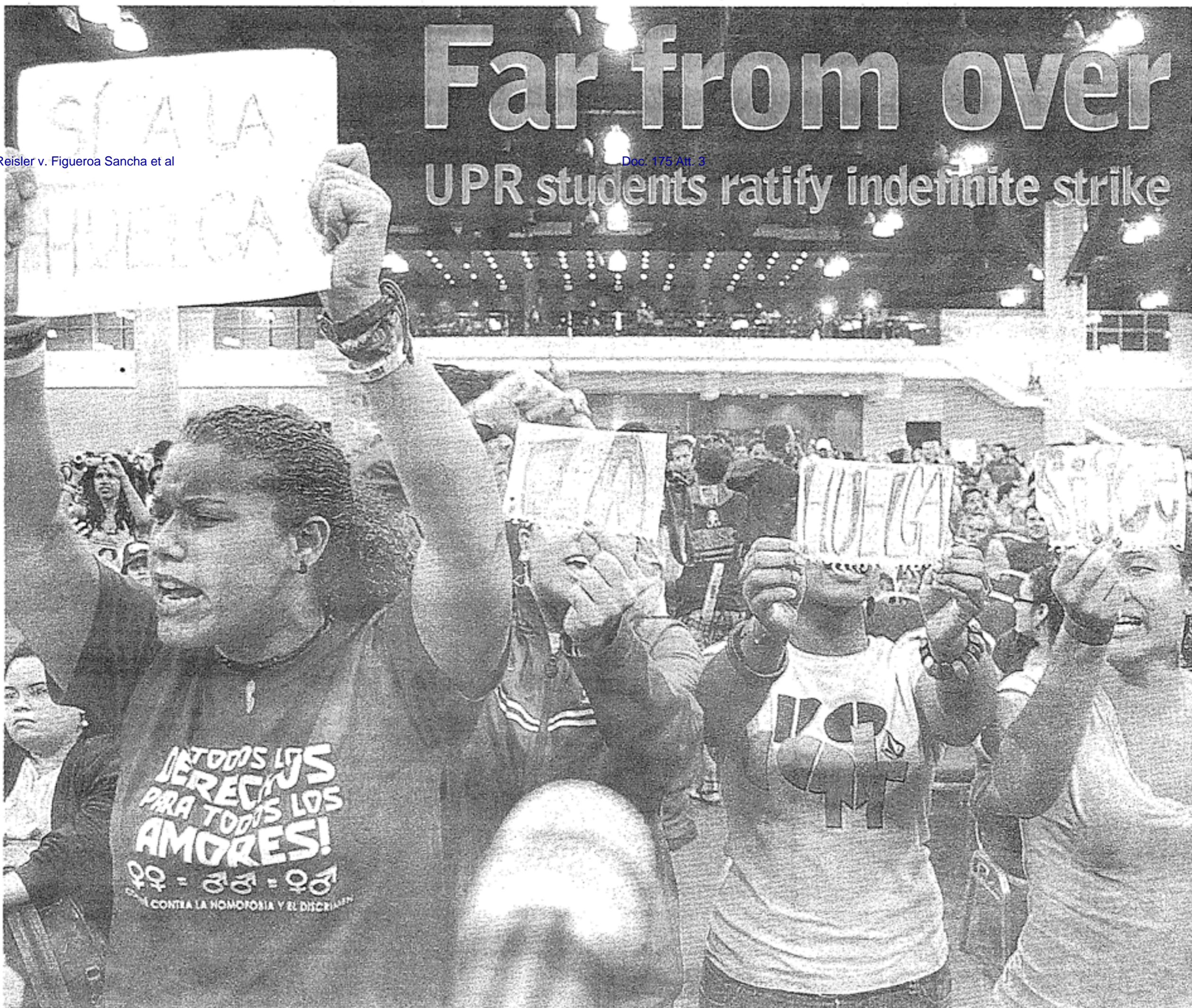
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Far from over

UPR students ratify indefinite strike



Daily Sun/Mauricio Pascual

Thousands of University of Puerto Rico students gathered at the Puerto Rico Convention Center on Thursday, when they voted to continue the indefinite strike against the administration. During the assembly, students demanded the UPR Board of Trustees come back to the negotiating table, to find a solution to the institution's fiscal woes.

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Perez Reisler v. Figueroa Sancha et al

Doc. 175 Att. 3

UPR student strike regains momentum



UPR students demonstrate in front of the Capitol after marching from the Puerto Rico Convention Center, where the student assembly took place.

Daily Sun/Francesca von Rabenau O'Reilly

BY JUAN A. HERNÁNDEZ
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An overwhelming majority of University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras campus students ratified in a general assembly Thursday the indefinite strike vote that has kept the state-run academic institution shut for 23 consecutive days.

The assembly, which had been endorsed by UPR president José Ramón De la Torre, Río Piedras campus Chancellor Ana R. Guadalupe and Board of Trustees Chairwoman Ygrí Rivera, was initially questioned by the striking students who considered a "desperate attempt" by university administrators to coerce the students into lifting the strike without considering their demands.

"They tried to ambush us. Today we went to their assembly, at a place of their choosing, on their terms and we won. This clearly demonstrates our strength," Student Negotiating Committee member Giovanni Roberto said.

"They should negotiate. They should stop being so intransigent," the student leader added.

The student assembly took place at the Puerto Rico Convention Center, which the UPR's administration leased for the event, and also provided transportation and security for the event. The administration's efforts to influence the students went as far as buying advertising space in local newspapers accusing Negotiating Com-



Students from different departments celebrate after the student general assembly overwhelmingly ratified the strike vote.

mittee members of "breaking their word" by refusing to take the "understandings" they had reached to the consideration of a student assembly.

De la Torre had denied Wednesday his actions were an attempt to influence or intimidate the students, but an effort to

provide the students with all the information needed before they made a decision.

"Attorney Villaronga [Board of Trustees legal counsel] dared us to take the agreements to the students assembly. We did and the students were not satisfied with

them. Now the ball is in their court [the trustees]," said Student General Council President Gabriel Laborde.

After the ratifying vote favoring the indefinite strike, De la Torre issued a written statement in which he stated Guadalupe, the Board of Trustees and he would meet "to ponder the possibilities and make decisions."

The statement also included a reaction of Guadalupe to the student vote. Both UPR officials concurred in questioning "the democratic principles" underlying the assembly they had not only endorsed the day before but also paid for and called "an opportunity to end the strike."

The assembly

Students began arriving at the Convention Center early in the morning on Thursday and lined up in front of the tables identified by academic departments in the parking lot on the west side of the facility. Some had arrived carpooling with friends, with their parents (who were not allowed in the center), using public transportation or in buses provided by the university administration. There was at least one bus from the Toa Alta municipal government bringing students to the assembly.

While waiting to check in, students chanted slogans, sang and danced "plenas" and greeted each other as they met with friends and fellow classmates, undaunted by a

Fortuño takes hands-off stance on UPR strike

BY XAVIRA NEGGERS CRESCIONI
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Gov. Fortuño has taken a hands-off policy regarding the strike at the University of Puerto Rico, saying Thursday he has yet to meet with the UPR administration to discuss what alternatives could be taken in the face of an extended indefinite strike, as approved by students in a general assembly meeting.

"My worry is the students and their future. My wish is that the two parties reach an agreement as soon as possible," Fortuño said. "Last weekend — when it was announced there were accords between the students who make up the negotiating committee and the administration — there was hope. Now what I see is that there are internal disputes among the students that I hope can be resolved to the benefit of students and the university."

The governor said he has not recently spoken with

UPR President José Ramón De la Torre, adding that he had received a letter from UPR professors who conduct scientific investigations.

"For all intents and purposes scientific investigation at the UPR has stopped," Fortuño said, adding that in their letter, professors said this could put \$25 million in funding at risk as well as 200 scholarships paid for with these funds.

"But, my main worry continues to be the students who need to graduate, who have accepted jobs or graduate studies [based on the premise they would graduate this summer], as well as those students and professors who are involved in scientific investigations ... That is what continues to worry me," Fortuño said.

To date, the strike, which began more than three weeks ago, has caused three UPR campuses to cancel summer classes, which is a bad precedent as this is the first year in which Puerto Rico got federal authorities to finance summer studies under the Pell Grant program, the governor said.



Daily Sun/Francesca von Rabenau O'Reilly, file
Gov. Fortuño

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UPR

downpour that soaked everything around 8:30 a.m.

Student athletes and the UPR cheerleading team displayed their talents performing their award-winning routines and stunts for the cheering crowd.

At 11:30 a.m., almost two and a half hours after the scheduled time, the assembly was opened with 2,886 students present, almost twice the minimum required for quorum.

After some discussions, the Student Negotiating Committee presented a detailed report on the negotiations with the Board of Trustees and its recommendations. The committee, including the individual departments' action committees representatives, unanimously recommended the ratification of the strike vote.

The students main demands are the

repealing of Certification 98, which limits and in some cases eliminates, tuition waivers for students, guarantees there will be no tuition increases and no privatization of services and/or campuses, and that their alternatives for the budget cutbacks will be implemented.

A motion was immediately presented to allow for a period of questions directly to the Negotiating Committee members from the floor. After almost 30 minutes of Q&A a motion for the ratification of the strike vote was introduced.

Student Carlos Collazo argued against the motion questioning whether the strike had already served its purpose. He called for continuing negotiations but with the gates open and taking classes.

"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," said Collazo, who tried to introduce an amendment to the motion but was declared out of order



Daily Sun/Mauricio Pascual
UPR Rio Piedras campus students stand shoulder-to-shoulder support of the indefinite strike during Thursday's assembly.



Daily Sun/Mauricio Pascual
Student Negotiating Committee member Arturo Ríos Escribano, left, embraces a fellow student after the assembly ratified the strike vote.

because the debate had already begun.

Some tension developed when, just before the motion was to be voted on, a new motion requesting a secret ballot was made. The motion was overwhelmingly defeated.

A visible majority of the students voting in favor of continuing the strike was confirmed after approximately a 100 hands went up against the strike. Immediately students started cheering and jumping into each others arms in celebration of the "victory over the university administration."

After the assembly was over, students marched from the Convention Center to the Capitol to celebrate the "victory."

Possible consequences

Should the fiscal health of the UPR be compromised by an insufficient budget and with a strike continuing indefinitely, Puerto Rico's only public university could be at risk of losing its licensing as an institution of higher education.

The Daily Sun received a copy of a letter sent by Puerto Rico Higher Education Council president José Aparicio Maldonado to De la Torre where he notes that recent press reports point that the University, and particularly the Río Piedras campus, has been involved in situations that could have caused a breach in some of the regulations governing the institution's operating license.

Aparicio Maldonado also noted in his letter that the UPR's financial situation and proposed budget cutbacks could also affect the institution's ability to continue offering its academic programs and thus its licensing.

Aparicio Maldonado further advised De la Torre that recent reductions in the teaching staff and other personnel could also affect the institution's operations.

"... therefore it is of particular importance for the University to act promptly to resolve this situation," the document stated.