

PUERTO RICO
Daily Sun



Times Square car bomb suspect appears in court
U.S. & WORLD PAGE 9

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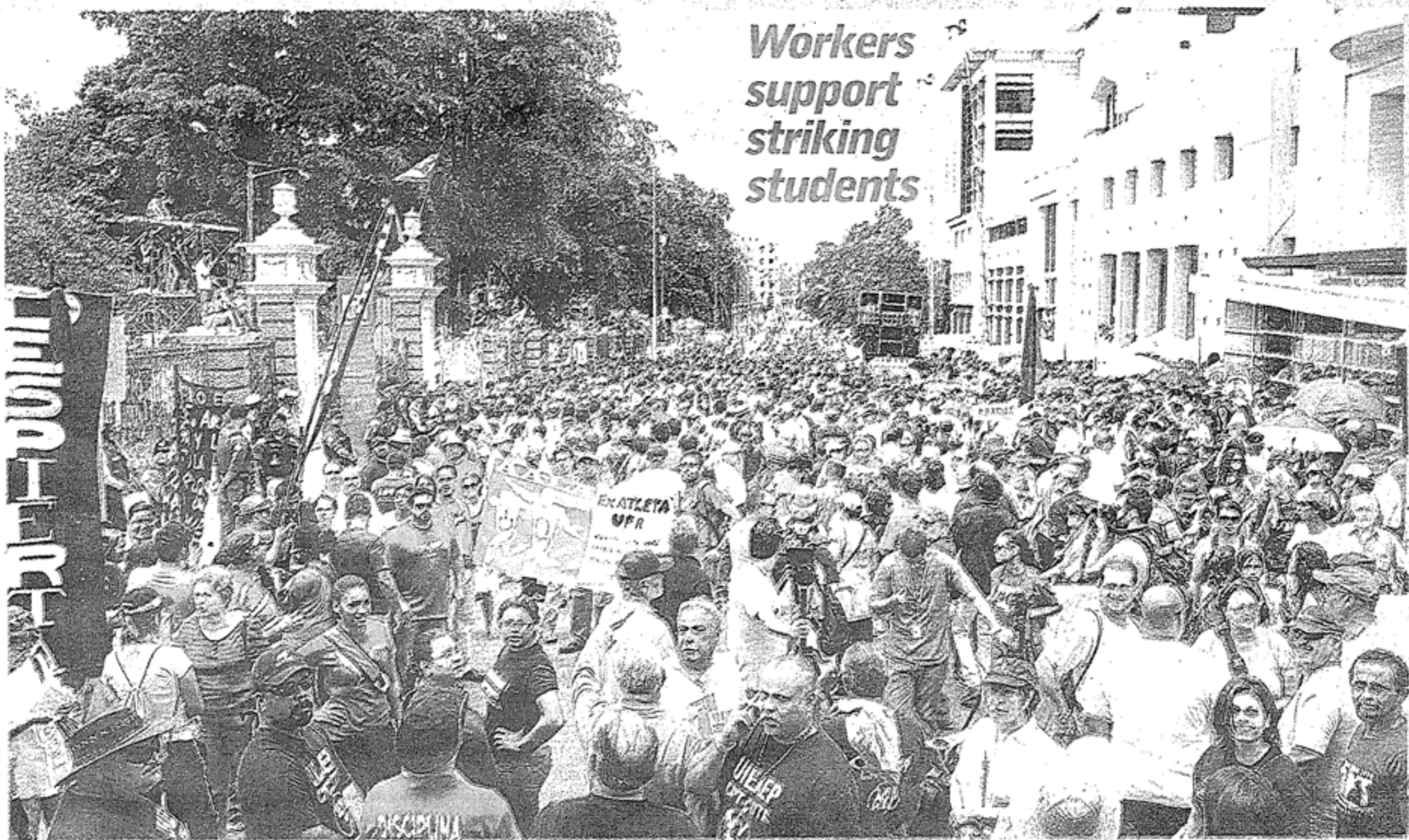
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Pfizer downsizes

Manufacturer slashing 1,500 local jobs, closing 2 plants

ECONOMY PAGE 11

Workers support striking students



Daily Sun/César Silva

Hundreds of protesters gather on Ponce de León Avenue in front of the University of Puerto Rico's main gates in Río Piedras to support striking students on Tuesday. Union workers from different sectors called a 24-hour, general strike to draw attention to the ongoing impasse between students and the UPR administration.

LOCAL PAGES 3,7

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Daily Sun / Cesar Silva

Just before the cultural activity began at the Río Piedras campus, a dispute between workers and police flared over crowd control.

Massive union support for UPR strike

BY JOSE ALVARADO VEGA
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Rejecting Gov. Fortuño's assertion that they are "outside forces" meddling in the University of Puerto Rico, unionized workers who participated in Tuesday's 24-hour island-wide general stoppage in solidarity with striking students said the island's public university system's obligation to provide affordable quality education to working-class students is being threatened by the administration's austerity measures.

In a departure from last year's

general stoppage mass rallies against fiscal emergency Law 7 layoffs in San Juan, members of the All Puerto Rico For Puerto Rico Labor Coalition mobilized Tuesday hundreds of workers to gatherings at the 10 UPR campuses where students are on strike.

Hundreds of government workers in San Juan marched from the Minillas government center in Santurce and the Labor Department headquarters in Hato Rey to UPR's flagship campus in Río Piedras, where about 6,000 people gathered in front of a stage the coalition set up near the main campus gate on Ponce de León Avenue, which fea-



Daily Sun / Cesar Silva

Hundreds of unionized government workers joined striking students.

tured cultural and musical performances by the likes of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra, Danny Rivera, Silverio Pérez, Carlos Esteban Fonseca, Tito Auger and Zoraida Santiago, which lasted throughout the afternoon.

Workers marched to the campus to the tune of Rivera's classic 1970s Nueva Trova hymn "Long live the

students" ("Que vivan los estudiantes"), blaring from a truck's loudspeakers.

"How can the governor say workers are outside forces when they have sons and daughters in the University of Puerto Rico?" asked Federico Torres Montalvo, head of the Puerto Rican Workers Syndicate and a coalition spokesman.

The coalition issued a statement refuting the governor's assertion that they are "outside forces," saying: "They have clearly identified how the university administration, beholden to the interests and aims of the current government, tries to apply strictly economic criteria to the university." It adds that students' struggles and demands are not foreign to the labor movement because they all have been negatively affected by the administration's fiscal emergency Law 7 layoffs and other austerity measures intended to appease bondholders. The new Closing Law has worsened conditions for many of these students who work in retail establishments, the statement says.

Hilda Rodríguez, 53, a GWU member who works in the Bayamón Regional Hospital as a laboratory technician, has a 20-year-old daughter who majors in biology at the Río Piedras campus and is also participating in the strike. She said her daughter benefits from a tuition exemption as an honor student as well as from a Pell Grant, a situation that would change with the implementation of Certification 98, which would force her to choose between the exemption and the grant.

"This would not be fair to her because she earned the exemption by her merit as a 4.00 student," said Rodríguez, who added that even the combination of both aid sources does not defray all of her daughter's university-related costs. "I often give her something for personal costs and to pay for laboratory costs she can't pay when the Pell Grant money is handed out late."

As workers marched down Luis Muñoz Rivera Avenue from the Labor Department toward the UPR, employees from several establish-

PLEASE SEE "STOPPAGE" PAGE 7

General strike a complete failure, Rodríguez-Ema says

BY THE DAILY SUN STAFF
AND WIRE SERVICES

Gov. Fortuño was not making public comments Tuesday on the 24-hour general strike, which Chief of Staff Marcos Rodríguez Ema called "a complete failure."

"They have spent 10 months calling for this strike and they did not close absolutely any government office or absolutely any basic service that the government provides. I believe that everyone believes that this [the strike] was a waste of time. It had no purpose," Rodríguez-Ema said during an afternoon television interview with local

Channel 2.

Rodríguez-Ema also told Inter News Service that the strike coordinators and the coalition of unions that make up All Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico were blaming the low attendance on the fact that the strike was called for last Friday, while he discounted the import of the University of Puerto Rico students' strike.

"I always knew that at one time or another there would be a student strike [at the UPR] because under every New Progressive Party administration there has been a student strike. That is how it is," Rodríguez-Ema said.

"The strike will end as soon as students sit

down to negotiate," Rodríguez Ema said, countering students' claims it has been the administration that has been unwilling to negotiate during the 29-day strike. As soon as the students have a group that represents them and these people sit down to negotiate, the loggerheads will be resolved, he said.

In regards to the general strike, everyone in Puerto Rico knows they — All Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico's Bishop Juan Vera, Popular Democratic Party President Héctor Ferrer, and PDP Sen. Alejandro García Padilla, among others — have been announcing plans for a general strike since October, Rodríguez Ema said.

"The most important thing about this is-

the message brought by this triumvirate group — who are the unions, the PDP, and the Hostosianos — which is a message of backwardness, pessimism, closed mindedness, that they almost want to see Puerto Rico drowning in failure and I believe people are sick and tired of that message," Rodríguez Ema said.

Proof that the premise of the general strike is a fraud is the fact that at 11 a.m. they had to bring the handful of people they had in front of Minillas Government Center to the artistic events that were going to be presented in front of the UPR Río Piedras campus gates in the afternoon, Rodríguez Ema said.

Strike threatens Pell Grant hikes

BY ROBERT FRIEDMAN
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WASHINGTON

A recent hike in Pell Grants could be in danger if Congress does not make up the \$5.5 billion shortfall in the program that some 8.7 million U.S. students, including more than 289,000 students attending college in Puerto Rico, will rely on next year to help meet tuition and other costs, Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi said Wednesday.

At risk could be the new Pell Grant maximum of \$5,550 promised to college students, or reductions in funding other crucial programs.

The resident commissioner joined 60 other House members asking leaders to appropriate funds to eliminate the funding gap without taking the money directly from the Pell Grant program, or from funding for other programs in the Labor, Health, Human Services and Education Committee's appropriations bill.

They wrote Chairman David Obey, D-Wisc., and Ranking Member Todd Tiahart, R-Kansas, of the subcommittee handling those appropriations.

"If the \$5.5 billion were taken from the Pell Grant program funding directly, such a cut would reduce the Pell Grant maximum award ... a drastic cut in funding for other programs in order to preserve Pell is a poor choice," the House members wrote.

The shortfall has been caused by an increased need in Pell Grants because of the recent economic problems, the congress members wrote.

"The economic downturn resulted in a greater number of students attending college in order to acquire the skills needed to compete in a difficult economy," the letter said. "With growing numbers of students enrolling, and those students having greater financial need than in years past, demand for Pell grants has surged."

Pell applications are increasing by nearly 20 percent annually "compared to the roughly three percent annual increases seen in better economic times," stated the letter. "This increase has resulted in the funding gap we are currently experiencing."

The issue comes also at a time when many believe that college costs, in the states at least, have gotten far out of hand. Tuition has rocketed upward at public and private schools alike, leaving students to accumulate mounting debts of \$20,000 or more that would have been unfathomable when their parents were in college.

The current strike at the University of Puerto Rico involves the possibility of rising tuition, but the some \$2,000 in annual cost to attend UPR pales in comparison to stateside counterparts where a growing number of liberal arts colleges and private universities, such as George Washington University in D.C., now charge in the \$40,000 per year range.

Tuition at public universities, which are run by the state are lower — from \$10,000 to \$20,000 annually, but systemic budget problems at many of those institutions force officials to abruptly raise tuition every few years.

Since 1976, the cost of a year of college has risen by a factor of eight, according to the U.S. Department of Education. This means the price tag of college triples about every 17 years.

UPR students: support for strike 'impressive'

BY JUAN A. HERNÁNDEZ
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University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras campus students received their strongest show of support yet when some 8,000 people gathered Tuesday at noon on Ponce de León Avenue in front of the institution's main gates in solidarity with their plight.

Workers, community leaders, performing artists, musicians and people in general started gathering in front of the state run university to show their support for the students who have occupied the campus for 28 consecutive days, demanding tuition waivers and other benefits and services be spared from budget cutbacks that could render them null.

"This has been very impressive. The people's support for the students' struggle is very impressive," General student Council president Gabriel Laborde said.

"This has become a struggle of the people for its students. Many of us are on our way out and have sacrificed willingly graduations, postgraduate studies ... all for the benefit of those who will become university students," Laborde said.

The student leader anticipated the Student Negotiating Committee will now focus on resuming negotiations with the Board of Trustees, but keeping the pressure at the gates as the student assembly mandated last Thursday.

"The Board [of Trustees] president has expressed her desire to put an end to the conflict, therefore she must be willing to negotiate to end the conflict so we can go back to class," Laborde said.

For Student Trustee elect René Vargas, all students must be "thankful for all this support."

"When yours is a just cause, a legitimate cause and you have to face injustice, and abuse from the [university] administration and the government the people's response is always in solidarity and help," he added.

Vargas agreed with Laborde about the need to continue negotiations with university administrators.

The students' main demands are the repeal 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 serv-



Daily Sun / Humberto Trías



Daily Sun / Humberto Trías

A group of student performers carries a derisive effigy of Gov. Fortuño, indicating their belief that he pulls the strings of the UPR administration.

ices and/or campuses, and that their alternatives for the budget cutbacks will be implemented.

As the student strike enters its fifth week, the students' demands have been reduced to the repeal of Certification 98's first section, which states students will not be eligible to receive

more than one of the university's managed benefits, including tuition waivers and the Pell Grant. So, it will be either one or the other.

UPR administrators have not ceded any point on the controversy.

Early Tuesday morning student leaders Giovanni Roberto, Aníbal Núñez and Arturo Ríos met with UPR president José Ramón De la Torre, Board of Trustees President Ygrí Rivera and Río Piedras Chancellor Ana Guadalupe in a radio talk show, where the possibility of a meeting was presented for consideration.

The university officials conditioned the meeting to the lifting of a demonstration in front of the Río Piedras Botanical Gardens, where the UPR president's office is located. The demonstration is being staged by the UPR's Workers Syndicate, which is demanding a collective bargaining process to negotiate a new contract.

Regarding the so called "outside forces" that according to Gov. Fortuño are acting upon the university conflict and should be taken out of the equation for the negotiations, Laborde said there are more of those forces than the governor is willing to admit.

"If he [Fortuño] is referring to the labor unions, which have done nothing but offer us their unconditional support, I suggest he should take a look at the police and all the agents that keep the university in a state of siege, the undercover agents sent to infiltrate our movement and even file "carpetas" (dossiers) on students. Those are the real "outside forces" acting upon the university," Laborde said.

PPPs provide govt's quick infrastructure



Daily Sun / Mauricio Pascual

Bob Carr, former premier of New South Wales Australia

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Public private partnerships enable governments to provide needed new infrastructure 20 years ahead of schedule compared with financing these works completely through the government, while reducing the government's risk in these investments, Bob Carr, former premier of New South Wales Australia told members of the San Juan Rotary Club on Tuesday.

"If a project fails [financially], the private consortium cannot roll up their highway and take it home. The work remains as an asset the government owns," Carr said, adding PPPs are a great way for governments to get more bang for their buck.

Carr, who was premier of the Australian territory from 1995 to 2005, used the PPP model to build six new highways that form a \$5.4 billion toll and beltway system around Sydney

that cost private investors \$4.6 billion and New South Wales government \$800 million. Given this success, the PPP model is being used throughout Australia to improve the country's infrastructure and productivity.

Among PPP projects underway in Australia are a \$3.5 billion desalinization plant for Melbourne that will provide one-third of water to the city with three million people. PPP financing is also being used to build Australia's largest road infrastructure project, known as Brisconconnections, at a cost of \$4.8 billion, as well as to modernize a slew of hospitals and schools in the country, Carr said.

The key to the success of PPPs in the public mind is whether or not the project provides good value to taxpayers, said Carr, who provided examples of successes and failures of the PPP financing model.

If a government or private consortium gets too greedy and does not provide sufficient value to taxpayers, people will vehemently oppose PPP projects, as was the case with cross city tunnel in Sydney that was built under this financial model, Carr said. The private consortium paid the government \$105 million as part of the project deal, but ended up charging people \$3.56 to use the 2.1 km tunnel that cut 20 minutes off of traffic time.

But, if governments and private companies aren't too greedy, PPPs can be good deals for taxpayers who want better services, as was the case with the 42 km Westlink M7 road near Sydney, which cut travel time down by one hour by eliminating 48 traffic lights and created 5,500 jobs.

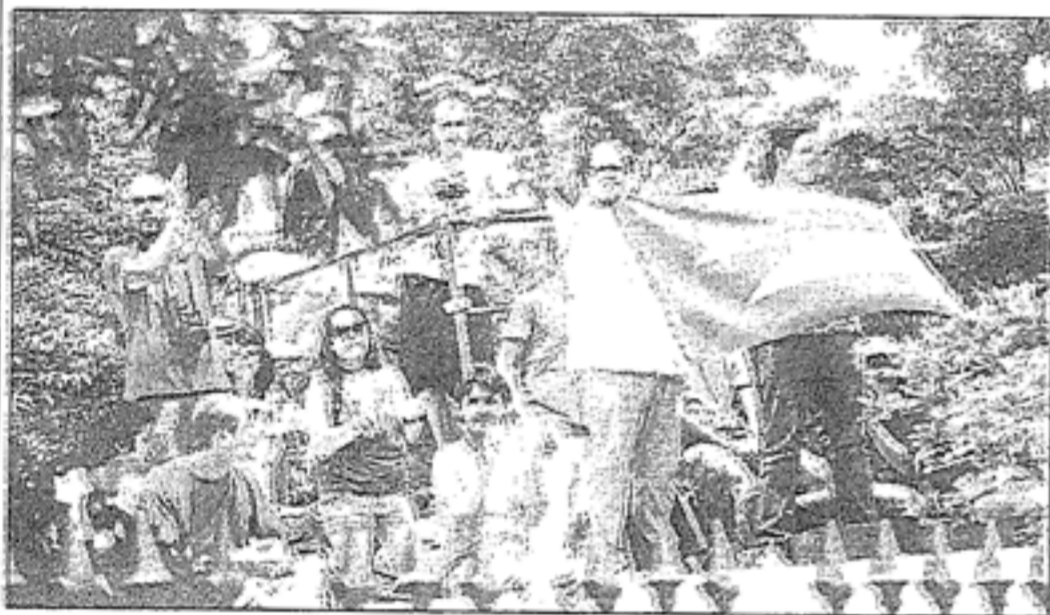
"Basically, we told people they would either have to wait 20 years for the government to build the road or they could pay a moderate toll and we could build the road immediately through a [PPP]. People said they wanted the new road now," Carr said.

"When its seen as value for money there is support for [PPPs]. The public will support a toll if they see it for value for money," Carr said. "The public accepts arguments [PPPs] deliver infrastructure years before government."

While PPPs are good to build new hospitals, schools and highways, they aren't so apt for other projects such as landfills, because the complexity of financial consortia behind these projects make it difficult to assign future liabilities of potential contamination from landfill to specific parties, Carr said.

PPPs also help governments save money by coming in only 4.3 percent over estimated project cost on average versus government projects' 18 percent, he said.

The commonwealth's PPP Authority invited Carr to visit the island and his visit was financed by Macquarie Capital, who are consultants to the PPP Authority. Since October 2005, Carr has been a consultant for Macquarie Capital's parent, Australia's largest investment bank Macquarie Bank, advising the company on policy and strategic issues which focus on the United States, China and Europe. Media reports suggested he would be paid \$500,000, and there was criticism over possible conflicts of interest given Macquarie's involvement in infrastructure projects in New South Wales.



Striking students wave the Puerto Rican flag behind police lines at Wednesday's general stoppage rally there.

Daily Sun / Cesar Silva

FROM PAGE 3
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ments came out to look. Many sympathized with the cause.

"Students sometimes have to apply pressure to defend the right to study," said Luis Sepúlveda, 40, a supervisor at a housing management company. He acknowledged, though, that he needed more information to pass judgment on students' specific grievances.

Coalition spokesman Emeritus Methodist Bishop Juan Vera said that the only "outside forces" at the campus were the private guards and police called in by the university administration and which have contributed to the "repressive" atmosphere at the campus.

"The students asked for our support because they believe things must change in this country," said Vera, who was accompanied by Deborah Vera Rivera, his 19-year-old daughter, a psychology student at the Río Piedras campus. She said that while she does not benefit either from tuition exemptions or the Pell Grant, she understands the plight of her fellow students in need. She said she is concerned in how the UPR administration is misappropriating its budget.

Vera expressed his satisfaction with the 24-hour strike called, while stating that it met its objective of halting 8 out of 9 regional gov-

ernment centers, except for Arecibo, which was partially open.

He said that, although he was satisfied, he was saddened by the assaults and that he hoped that "the repression against the labor movement stops."

He said that several protestors were injured when hit by Puerto Rico Police Riot Squads, saying that the policemen arrived at the Aguadilla and Humacao Government Centers and attacked those rallying in those facilities.

The ports zone in Isla Grande was also halted by the protestors who supported the 24 hour general strike against Law 7 and in solidarity with the UPR strike. Urban planner José Rivera Santana said that the protestors located at the entrance to the maritime ports in Isla Grande persuaded the majority of truckers and others visiting the zone not to go into work.

All work was halted in the Medical Sciences Campus of the UPR and in the Medical Center there were reports of great absenteeism, where only the Medical Emergency Room was working normally.

The All Puerto Rico For Puerto Rico Coalition charged that a National Guard officer attempted to run over protestors who support the 24 hour strike called by the labor union group while he was in the Isla Grande ports.

Inter News Service contributed to this report.

Search for new chancellor continues at UPR Carolina

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The student strike at the University of Puerto Rico, which has entered its 29th day today, appears not to have stopped the process to select new chancellors, at least at the Carolina campus.

In a letter dated May 12, UPR President José Ramón De la Torre informed the Carolina campus community of the list of candidates running for chancellor.

The list includes interim chancellor Trinidad Fernández, who has the most support for the job, according to sources consulted by the Daily Sun. Under her tenure, the campus inaugurated new facilities for its hotel administration studies.

The other candidate, who also has support, is Miguel Guzman Bosch, a Business Administration professor.

Other candidates include José A. Penalbert, a physics professor who has run for chancellor at least three times; Eldra G. Hernández, a Business Administration professor who has a reputation for being tough on students; and Carlos Soriol Machado, an advertising and graphic arts professor, who years ago was rep-

rimanded by the Academic Senate over his treatment of other professors, according to sources. The Daily Sun could not reach any of the candidates Tuesday for comment.

The letter informs the Carolina campus that the candidates will present their plans on May 27 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Central Administration's Terrace. De la Torre said that university community members wishing to give opinions about candidates will have 10 minutes to present their views on May 20 from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. They will have to request a turn to speak to Ivonne Santoni at 787-250-0000. Individuals can also submit written opinions, which could be e-mailed to consulta.directa@upr.edu.

"I urge the university community to participate in the process to identify the persons who can better serve the University of Puerto Rico in Carolina," De la Torre said.

Labor union groups have blocked the entrances to the Central Administration facilities and it was not immediately clear if the proposed hearings will take place.

The date on De la Torres' letter was a day before Río Piedras campus students gathered at the Convention Center and voted to continue the general strike.