

Against colonialist settlements (for a just, sovereign and sustainable Puerto Rico)

ANTICOLONIALISM



Abandoned billboard signs overlooking the Caribbean Sea are spray painted under the slogan #yankeegohome, while driving west on Highway 2 in Puerto Rico. Displacement stories have become increasingly common since 2019. Entire communities, including the elderly, must find new homes as millionaires from Silicon Valley, the rest of the

United States and Europe buy properties.

These super-rich people are taking advantage of a bill that was approved by the conservative party and signed into law as Law 60 by former Governor Ricky Rosselló, before he was removed from office by the most widespread protests in the history of Puerto Rico in the summer of 2019. The law exempts foreign companies and individuals from paying federal income taxes on capital gains, including capital gains of U.S. origin, provided they have a bona fide residence in Puerto Rico.

Passing laws to disenfranchise and dispossess indigenous peoples of their lands is not new. The Spanish empire and other Europeans got involved in this nefarious practice at the end of the 19th century in Puerto Rico. They emulated the US Rural Settlement Act of 1862, which allowed the US government to dispossess Native Americans of their land. The current period in Puerto Rico's history is no different.

In response to this new wave of colonialism, grassroots groups are conducting nonviolent occupation campaigns to reclaim buildings and land, engaging in fundraising to empower peasants, using social media platforms, and coordinating with the diaspora. Puerto Rican to popularize their fight. And the stakes are much higher than at first glance: less indigenous-owned farmland would mean more food dependency and environmentally unsustainable practices, with significant long-term consequences for Puerto Ricans.

From the abolition of Law 60 to parallel institutional development and beyond.

A grassroots group called #AbolishAct60 has been using social media platforms to educate the public about the act and its repercussions for Puerto Ricans. This has included the creation of networking groups with diaspora Puerto Ricans in the United States to call out their senators and congressmen, as well as the use of Internet memes to amplify the injustices that Law 60 brings to the island. But the organization goes far beyond awareness.

Grassroots organizers are nonviolently occupying buildings in urban areas, such as Caguas and Río Piedras, to prevent these areas from being gentrified. The occupied spaces are being used for mutual support (including as epicenters for parallel institutional development) in the face of government neglect since Hurricane Maria in 2017. Some of the spaces initially served as shelters and community redistribution points for food and supplies. sent from the diaspora. Mostly run by women, many of the spaces are now also used to run after-school programs for children, in the wake of a massive school closure campaign. (Former education secretary Julia Keleher, who started the campaign, ended up facing federal charges in part for giving school property to a developer for \$1 in exchange for a luxury apartment.)

Grassroots organizations are also raising funds for landless peasants to buy and own land. For example, the Community Land Trust for Sustainable Agriculture has been raising money to purchase farmland for farmers committed to using sustainable practices. I myself am part of a group that will soon launch another fundraising campaign. Puerto Rico imports 85% of its food, making food sovereignty and sustainable agricultural practices urgent needs. Over the last decade there has been a resurgence of young farmers engaging in sustainable practices and building a movement towards food sovereignty.

Another form of resistance has included land confiscation, in which people non-violently occupy agricultural property that has not been used for more than 50 years, in the hope that it will be recognized by community members and produce a change in ownership, from private to collective.

This form of occupation is known as occupation with a conscience. Nonviolent occupants meet with community members to share their vision for the use of the space and thus directly engage the community in their efforts. Its strategy is one of transparency, of creating sustainable communities through mutual support and community collaboration.

The future of Puerto Rico's decolonial struggle

In 2019, a chat was leaked in which Puerto Rican officials, including Rosselló, stated that they were working for a "Puerto Rico without Puerto Ricans." In recent years, people have gone to the polls to push for change, but it has not been enough.

Grassroots organizing and disruptive actions outside of the electoral process are helping to increase pressure on the incompetence of the current administration. The expressed grievances go beyond the housing and land crisis; they also include school damage from a 2020 earthquake, toll increases, privatization of the public energy company non-compliance with environmental laws, ignoring femicide, and much more.

There is a common denominator between all these demands, it is transparency. This historic moment in Puerto Rico exemplifies the need to create a new path for the future we want. Decolonial struggles require collective rethinking, reinvention, and rewriting of the narratives our movement wants transcribed into history books.

It is up to Puerto Ricans to build the future that has been denied us for so long: a just, sovereign and sustainable Puerto Rico and, in particular, a future that allows us to preserve indigenous knowledge to combat climate change. After more than 500 years of colonization, we have defended our land, our resources, our language and our culture. Puerto Rico has a long history of civil resistance struggles that have been used to defend what we love most: our connection to our land, our communities, and our ways of understanding and moving through this world.

We will continue to move forward with new and creative forms of resistance.

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