Colonial Capitalism and Puerto Rico

written by Rafael Bernabe | February 8, 2024

It is now widely accepted that a climate crisis due to global warming, resulting from the emission of greenhouse gases, poses an unprecedented threat to human society. Global mean temperature must be kept at less than 1.5º C above the pre-industrial level if catastrophic impacts are to be avoided (desertification, rising sea levels, reduction of bio-diversity, water shortages, reductions in agricultural productivity, extreme climate events). A rise beyond 2º C will probably unleash a tipping-point dynamic in which the effects of warming generate further warming in a runaway process that will slowly but surely make human existence progressively harder and harsher in a once lush and fertile biosphere.

Capitalism and Natural Limits

The notion that this threat is the result of human activity is true, but insufficient. After all, the process we now call climate change only began in the second half of the 1700s and accelerated tremendously after 1945. The dates are enough to indicate that the threat of climate change is the result, not of human activity in general, but of a specific type of social relationship. It is the cumulative result of the rise, expansion, and generalization of capitalist production. The basic elements of such relations are well-known. Simply put: most people lack the means to live on their own and must hire themselves out to those who own land, factories, service locations, commercial establishments, transportation systems, and so on. The latter compete in the market. To do so successfully, they must reduce costs in order to offer attractive prices while ensuring a profit, which, in turn, they must largely reinvest, if they are to survive in the competitive race. This implies a constant drive to intensify the exploitation of labor (lengthen the working-day, lower wages and benefits, speed-up work, reduce rest periods, etc.), to deplete natural sources and resources (from soil exhaustion to misuse of non-renewable materials) and to ignore natural limits, all in the pursuit of the profit that each capitalist must secure, under threat of extinction. Competing capitals cannot behave in any other way: this is the nature of the capitalist game. If we do not like the consequences, then we must change the game.[1]

Each capitalist seeks to grow and expand. Capital, after all, is an amount of value that grows. If it ceases to grow, it ceases to be capital. This is not the result of a cult or religion of the GDP: capitalism exhibited its tendency to expansion long before that statistical notion was invented. Its tendency toward increased productivity and expanded production has been one of its defining characteristics since its birth. This is the aspect of capitalist society which once made it a progressive moment in human development, but which always had a destructive dimension that carried a horrendous human and ecological cost. That cost has now clearly overshadowed all other aspects of this particular form of organizing human affairs.

The struggle for survival in the capitalist market can rarely see beyond the next yearly report: it lacks the broad or long-term view required to consider ecological impacts or the equilibriums, limits or rules of natural systems. Capitalism, ruled by the pursuit of private profit, is incompatible with

even the plainer definitions of sustainability, such as the Brundlant report's oft-cited formula: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Capitalism fails on both accounts, present and future: it cannot adequately meet the needs of many in the present while it *also* undermines the ability of future generations to do so.

As John Bellamy Foster and others have underlined, Marx himself recognized the importance of Justus von Liebig's studies on the results of capitalist agriculture, namely his description of how it extracted nutrients from the land, with the double result of polluting the cities and exhausting the soil.[2] He considered that capitalism was thus not only characterized by the exploitation of labor, but also by the rift, or rupture, in humanity's metabolic interaction with nature. Climate change is another spectacular example of the metabolic rift described by Marx. Capitalism eventually found a technological fix to the particular rift studied by Liebig: the invention of synthetic fertilizers, which in turn brought unwanted ecological consequences. The rift can only be repaired by abolishing the system that produces it, not by technical mitigations that seek to perpetuate it. This does not mean, of course, that we must not seek changes within the existing system.

Capitalist Limits

Capital does not respect natural limits, but it has limits: the limits created by its own contradictions. The very same drive for profit that pushes it to expand production regardless of environmental impacts leads it to increased mechanization, the replacement of workers by machines, in order to reduce unit costs and undercut the competition. But capitalist profit is unpaid labor: in the pursuit of profit each capital acts in a way that reduces the relative significance of labor in production, a process which eventually pulls down the general rate of profit. This is often indicated by the fact that many commodities cannot be sold at the expected profit. All of a sudden there are too many commodities, machines and money to be used as capital, that is to say, that can bring back increased value, at the expected rate. Investment slows down, or stops, unemployment grows, demand falls, debtors default, some corporations and banks fail. Briefly put: capitalism is irremediably afflicted by recurrent moments of crisis and of prolonged recession and depression.[3]

Consequently, in certain periods and locations, capitalism's ecological destruction combines malignantly with economic crisis and aggravated social distress. Under such circumstances, capitalists expertly mobilize the desire for jobs and economic recovery to push any environmental concerns away. And during periods of expansion they argue that environmental measures will result in job losses. An environmental program, to gain mass support, must therefore address not only ecological but also other concerns of working people. Otherwise many will go for the promise of jobs and income, at the expense of nature.[4]

Puerto Rico is an example of this dynamic. The Puerto Rican economy has not grown since 2006. Its real GDP has fallen by close to 14%.[5] Energy consumption has fallen significantly. In some respects then, the crisis of Puerto Rico's colonial-capitalist economy has been good for the planet. But this comes at a terrible social cost: loss of 250,000 jobs (about 20% of the jobs that existed in 2006), deeper and wider poverty, mass migration, deterioration of infrastructure and public services, growth of informal economies, etc. Meanwhile, ecologically destructive practices, such as energy generation with oil and coal, are still in place. Continued economic paralysis is not an acceptable or just option for Puerto Rico, but nor is renewed growth and economic expansion based on ecologically destructive practices, such as the reliance on fossil fuels. Puerto Rico needs both economic and ecological well-being. That, of course, is what the whole world needs.

Basic Needs and Nature

What are the basic elements of such an economic and ecological reconstruction? Two dimensions are evident: the basic needs of all must be satisfied in a manner that progressively repairs the "metabolic rift" mentioned above, i.e. that reduces our destructive impact on the environment. Basic needs certainly include water, food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, health, education, energy, transportation and mobility, but the list is open to debate and expansion.[6]

Avoiding catastrophic climate change requires a 40-60 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. This requires a shift from fossil to renewable, clean, and secure energy. But, given the speed of the required change, the technology available, the desirability of not relying on nuclear energy and of reducing the use of carbon capture, it will not be enough. Reducing emissions will demand a reduction in overall energy consumption. This will require a reduction in production.[7]

Satisfying basic needs will require the expansion of production in some sectors. Thus, attaining the goal of covering basic needs and addressing the climate crisis will require the elimination and reduction of certain activities and the expansion of others. It requires the cessation of all harmful and wasteful production (armaments is an evident example); rapid move away from the individual car and the expansion of collective transport; replacement of agri-business with ecological farming; localization of production to reduce transport needs; protection and restoration of forests; dietary shifts, (reduced meat consumption), among other changes proposed by many activists and movements.

Such a program can and must offer a vision, not of impoverished existence, but of richer lives, not only through the guaranteed satisfaction of basic needs but through the combined offer of jobs for all and a reduced working-day or working-week. Shortening the working-day, a classical demand of the labor movement, is the concrete basis for the redefinition of human progress and well-being in qualitative and not qualitative terms, not as the accumulation, acquisition, or desire for an ever growing number of commodities, but as the conquest of free time for creative, relaxing, pleasurable, intellectual or physical, individual or shared, self-determined activities.[8] Nothing could be further from the logic of capitalism, which condemns many to unemployment and forced idleness in order to impose overwork on others.

Such a coordinated reorientation of production and priorities will not result from the imperatives of capitalist competition, which operate blindly as if the planet was limitless. Not surprisingly, during the last two decades, capital and the states that represent it have subordinated climate action to the profit motive and the rules of the market. Climate initiatives, therefore, have been slow, limited, partial, and altogether insufficient.

Adequate climate action must be imposed on capital from without and against its will. It must be forced to act against its nature, relinquishing present or potential profits in order to respect environmental limits. Indeed, the rapid and coordinated de-growth of some and the expansion of other activities combined with the social reforms required to address climate change ideally demand social control of key economic sectors and a democratically planned economy, freed from the imperatives of maximum private accumulation, incompatible with the triple objective of covering basic needs, qualitatively enriching human lives and respecting natural limits.[9]

Some could object that this argument leads to a bleak outlook, since such a political and economic transformation is not in the immediate agenda. But it is wrong to conclude from our argument that nothing could or should be done, besides proclaiming the need for ecosocialism. Quite the contrary, gains are not only possible within capitalism, but only through the struggle for them can a growing number of people come to understand the need for radical change and develop the capacity and the confidence to attain it.

Within and Against the System

Anti-capitalism does not mean abandoning the struggle for change within capitalism, but rather understanding that the change we need runs counter to its logic. The choice is not between abstractly proclaiming the need for socialism or working within the system, but rather between different ways of acting within it. Do we seek to turn the race for profit into an engine for "green growth" or are we willing to denounce and attack profits in order to protect people and nature from capital's voracity?[10]

As the experience of the last two decades demonstrates, even the mildest legislation to address climate change will be bitterly resisted, mutilated, and hobbled, if it somehow impinges on capitalist profits. Climate legislation will require far more than law drafting and lobbying initiatives. It will require mass mobilization. And the movement against climate change will only become massive if it addresses other key questions, besides climate change. The general guiding principle is simple enough: at any juncture and dilemma we must put people and nature before profits. This should guide our response to capital's predictable reaction to any encroachment on its prerogatives: if it goes on investment strike, it must be nationalized; if it tries to relocate to avoid ecological measures, its movement must be controlled; if the financial sector is complicit with this, it should be nationalized as well.[11]

Two Souls of the Green New Deal

In 2019 Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward Markey introduced a resolution in Congress for a Green New Deal (GND), which sparked considerable debate.[12] Did the GND square with the perspective formulated above? The short answer is yes and no. On the one hand, it posed ecological tasks with the urgency they demand, while also linking them to key struggles for social and labor justice. This must be applauded. On the other hand, it sought to jump-start the capitalist economy into a new green expansion in which "green jobs" will be coupled with green profits: capitalist growth and profits are to be reconciled with zero-net emissions by 2050.

The GND rightly denounced that many in the United States lack access to clean air, water, healthy food, health care, housing, transportation, and education. Four decades of stagnant real wages and the erosion of the bargaining power of organized labor have led to levels of inequality unseen since the 1920s. To this impact on working people, the GND added the "historic oppression" suffered by "frontline and vulnerable communities" which include: indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, depopulated rural communities, the poor, low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth.

The GND proposed a full transition to clean, renewable, zero emission energy sources in ten years while also building an energy efficient smart-grid; upgrading buildings for energy efficiency; eliminating greenhouse emissions from transportation, and other infrastructure; expanding public transit, and promoting "family farming." It coupled these actions with elements required for a socially just transition to a green economy: guaranteed jobs; career employment; protection of the right to organize, unionize, and collectively bargain; policies that attack racial, gender, regional, and other inequalities, including programs to address and repair the injustices suffered by the historically oppressed communities listed above.

In the GND, as formulated by the Ocasio-Markey resolution, the means to attain this remain rather vague. But the basic framework suggested corresponded to what some have characterized as "Green Keynesianism": monetary stimulus and private-public partnerships to promote profitable investment along the lines mentioned above.[13] The GND seemed to be a wager on "green profits" as the lever toward jobs and a sustainable economy. But this would leave capitalism's drive toward limitless

expansion untouched. Indeed, like the original New Deal, it seemed to embrace the re-launching of rapid growth as its goal, a projection hardly compatible with an ecological perspective in a limited planet and, more specifically, with the objective of zero-net emissions by 2050.

Things would be worse if in order to reconcile capitalist growth with reduced emissions in the time available to us, the GND were to embrace nuclear energy or the widespread use of carbon capture technology. Of course, these considerations refer to the limits of the GND if enacted. But enactment was hardly assured. Opposition will come from all sectors of the vast petro-industrial complex including the oil, petrochemical, automobile, aeronautic, shipping industries, and all their materially and financially related sectors. Only a mass movement capable of breaking the resistance of the most powerful sector of the dominant class can gain enactment of anything approaching the GND. Such a movement can and should seek to go beyond Green Keynesianism toward the creation of a broadened public sector and real steps toward a nationalized and democratically planned economy.

The GND was thus both too radical and not radical enough. It was not radical enough in terms of the action required to avert catastrophic climate change between now and 2050, not to speak of constructing a sustainable economy, which is incompatible with infinite capitalist growth. But it was too radical from the perspective of the ruling capitalist class and its political representatives.

Neither Rejection nor Indifference

Our attitude towards reforms like this cannot be rejection, indifference, or blind endorsement. It must include at least four elements. We must, one, embrace its basic climate and social justice goals; two, seek to build mass mobilizations demanding immediate action in that direction; three, point out the limits of the reform as it is formulated; and, four, propose a more adequate response to the task at hand. We must also argue for an effective response to capital's predictable resistance: investment strikes must be answered with nationalization, capital flight with capital controls, etc. Our watchword at all junctures is simple: people and nature before profits.

Our critique of the GND cannot overlook the lack of consideration of the past and present impact of imperialism and colonialism and the need to address it. The issue is not entirely absent: the GND refered to the "historic oppression" of indigenous communities and called for the enforcement of the "sovereign rights of tribal nations." Yet it said not one word about Puerto Rico, the largest remaining U.S. colony, and the need to combine decarbonization with decolonization. The absence was somewhat striking, since Puerto Rico's debt and economic crisis, combined with the consequences of an extreme climate event (Hurricane Maria in September 2017) had reignited the debate in Congress, the U.S. press, and elsewhere on what the impact of U.S. policies toward the island have been in the past and what those policies should be in the present and the future. Should not people under colonial rule be listed among the communities impaired by a form of "historic oppression" that the GND sought to abolish?

Imperialism, Colonialism and Climate Action

For the purposes of this discussion we can define imperialism as the tendency of the developed capitalist economies and states to subordinate the rest of the world to their needs, as defined by their dominant capitalist interests. Imperialist control takes many forms, from colonial rule to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Trade Organization (WTO). It has marched under different banners, from the protection of exclusive economic zones to "free trade." It is propelled by the search for profit to access masses of labor to exploit, vast extensions of land to cultivate, and additional materials to extract.

Thus, underdeveloped countries have been the object of particularly harsh forms of exploitation of

labor, depletion of resources, and destruction of nature. The international division of labor, imposed by the developed economies, specialized them in export production, forcing them into ecologically destructive activities (over exploitation of forests, for example, or fossil fuel extraction, in countries that possess such resources).

A climate program for these countries requires a rapid transition from fossil to renewable sources of energy; the cessation of oil and gas extraction and deforestation; increased localization of production, that is to say, reduced production for export and decreased dependence on imports, including but not limited to increased food production for the home market.

Underdeveloped countries cannot be expected to embark on this transformation while burdened with massive debts that push them to prioritize exports to access hard currency, or while subjected to WTO regulations which prohibit any attempt to favor local producers as violations of the tenets of free trade. Nor can they be expected to undertake such a transition with their strained financial and weak technological basis.

Therefore, a global climate program must include the cancellation of Third World debt, the cessation of IMF, WTO and other free trade impositions, as well as a massive transfer of resources from the developed countries.[14] Needless to say, beyond the crucial question of climate change, these are also some of the measures that would enable these countries to escape their chronic situation of impoverishment. In other words, the need to prevent catastrophic climate change adds urgency to the link that socialists have historically argued should exist between the struggle for social justice in the advanced capitalist countries and the anti-imperialist struggle in the subordinated countries.

Puerto Rico is an example of this. It is a colony of the United States, suffering from the consequences of a decade-long economic depression. Its colonial status must end. Its economy must be reconstructed. And key elements of a program to address its economic crisis and the legacy of U.S. colonial rule fully coincide with the central features required to confront the threat of climate change in the Global South: cancellation of an unsustainable debt burden; liberation from the imperatives of free trade policies to enable localization of production, including but not limited to increased food production; and transfer of considerable resources to enable a rapid transition to renewable energy.[15] These elements need to become part of a viable and just GND. For this, the original New Deal provides some interesting precedents and lessons. But first we must take a brief look at Puerto Rico’s situation under U.S. rule and its present crisis.

Puerto Rico under U.S. Colonial Rule

Puerto Rico has been a colony of the United States since the Spanish-American War of 1898. In a series of decisions in 1901, known as the Insular Cases, the U.S. Supreme Court defined Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory, a possession but not part of the United States, under the plenary powers of Congress.[16]

Although Congress has reorganized the territorial government over the years, the colonial nature of the relationship has remained unchanged. Under the present status, established in 1952 and officially known in English as “Commonwealth,” Puerto Ricans elect their governor and legislature, but they only attend to insular matters. Puerto Rico is subject to both federal legislation and executive decisions, but its inhabitants have no participation or representation in their elaboration.

But colonialism has an economic as well as a political dimension. Through the different epochs of Puerto Rico’s economic evolution since 1898, some features have remained constant. Let us briefly point out six of them.[17]

First, since 1900 Puerto Rico's economy has been shaped by the movement of U.S. capital. U.S. corporations have owned the main sectors of its economy. Such was the case before World War II, when sugar production was the main industry, during the expansion of light manufacturing from the 1940s to the 1970s, and during the following period, characterized by capital intensive manufacturing (pharmaceuticals, for example).

Second, under the control of external capital Puerto Rico's economic evolution has been unbalanced and one-sided (before 1950, monoculture without industry, after that, fragmented industry without agriculture); marked by discontinuity (specialization in one activity abandoned for the next) and vulnerability to external shifts in the sectors of specialization (sugar, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals). After 1950, this included the destruction of agriculture. Puerto Rico now imports more than 85 percent of its food.

Third, a further consequence of the domination of Puerto Rico's economy by U.S. capital has been the outflow, largely toward the U.S., of a significant portion of the income generated in Puerto Rico. At present, it is estimated that around $35 billion leave the island each year, in the form of dividends and other payments. This is around 35 percent of Puerto Rico's gross domestic product. This figure includes both profits generated in Puerto Rico as well as declared there for tax avoidance purposes.

In other words, this capital is not reinvested in Puerto Rico. Which leads to a fourth feature of its economy: Puerto Rico's dependent economy has never been able to provide sufficient employment for its workforce. At present, Puerto Rico has a 40 percent labor participation rate (compared to 63 percent in the United States). The official unemployment rate is 10 percent. Even between 1950 and 1964, that is to say, during the period of Puerto Rico's postwar economic expansion, which led many to see it as a model for other underdeveloped countries, the number of jobs fell.[18] In other words, manufacturing was not able to compensate for the jobs lost in agriculture.

This leads us to the fifth feature of Puerto Rico's economic evolution since 1898: given the lack of employment, considerable migration has been a feature of Puerto Rican life. This was the case in the 1910s and 1920s, when the first Puerto Rican *colonia* took shape in New York, as well as in the mass migration of the 1950s and during the last decade of economic contraction. Puerto Ricans have been incorporated into the U.S. working class as one of its discriminated and super-exploited sectors, along with African Americans and other Latinos. Deeply connected and concerned with the situation of their homeland, they are also part of a multiracial and multinational U.S. working class.

Mass unemployment depresses wages, which deepens inequality and creates high levels of poverty. This helps explain the sixth feature: the persistence of the wide gap in living standards between Puerto Rico and the United States. Puerto Rico's per capita income is a third of the U.S. figure. It is half of the per capita income of the poorest state, Mississippi. The yearly median household income in the United States is $53,900. In Puerto Rico it is $19,000.[19] Around 45 percent of the people and 55 percent of the children in Puerto Rico live under the U.S. poverty level.

Ecological Consequences

The ecological consequences of colonial underdevelopment would make a longer list than we can provide here. Sugar monoculture in the coastal regions (with the well-known effects of such one-sided forms of cultivation) was replaced with fragmented industrialization and the marginalization of agriculture. Both excluded a diversified agriculture and food production for the home market. They implied high dependence on food imports, with the attendant reliance on long-distance shipping. The process of partial industrialization during the postwar boom deepened the ecological impact of colonial underdevelopment. The pursuit of hydro-electric power was replaced with oil-fueled plants. Railroad and streetcar systems were dismantled to be replaced by complete dependence on private

cars. Suburban sprawl destroyed agricultural land and commercial life in town centers. Highway construction fragmented the landscape, mutilated the habitat of many species, increased erosion, and accelerated the sedimentation of river beds. U.S. consumption patterns, with a high component of packaging and disposable elements were adopted, generating a tremendous amount of waste, leading to the present crisis in garbage disposal.[20] Lack of regulations and negligent enforcement led to indiscriminate urbanization of beachfronts and coastal areas, generating erosion that has reached crisis proportions in some areas. Oil and coal-burning electrical plants, manufacturing and food processing operations, cement factories, refineries and petrochemical installations and the oil tankers serving them polluted air, water, and soil in or around the island.

As the initial wave of investments in light manufacturing faltered, in the mid-1960s government planners adopted a program centered on oil: the island was to become a hub of oil refining, petrochemical and related operations, including the port facilities for the tankers and other vessels required for such activities. Fortunately, and largely thanks to widespread opposition, Puerto Rico was not transformed into the petro-island envisaged by some. But enough oil-related operations were built to inflict significant damage on the island, as part of the fossil fuel industry's assault on the planet.

In recent years a significant portion of the tourist industry has relied on cruise ship operations, major emitters of greenhouse gases, to mention just one of their dire ecological consequences. To complete this bleak record, after the sugar monoculture was replaced by neglect of agriculture, in recent years Puerto Rico has become the site of experiments and test operations conducted by Monsanto, whose chemical fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified crops are the opposite of the ecological farming that Puerto Rico and the world needs.

Ashley Dawson has referred to "extreme cities" located in coastal areas and in the normal path of hurricanes and typhoons, often characterized by unplanned urban growth, widespread poverty, and inadequate or fragile infrastructure. They are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change.[21] Following Dawson, Puerto Rico could perhaps be described as an extreme island, a diagnosis tragically confirmed by the human and material impact of Hurricane María in 2017.[22]

A History of Resistance

Puerto Rico has a long history of environmental struggles beginning in the mid-1960s with the movement against projected copper mining operations in the center of the island (Lares, Utuado, and Adjuntas) and continuing in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the opposition to the plans to build an oil "super-port" along with a hub of refining and petrochemical operations on the western coast.[23] Through the 1970s and 1980s, dozens of initiatives also emerged against the pollution of air, water, and soil by manufacturing and food processing operations (tuna canning and packing plants, for example), oil refining and petrochemical installations, quarries, cement factories, and hotels around the island.

Since the 1960s, different initiatives have struggled to protect coastal areas from sand extraction by the construction industry, appropriation and pollution by tourist operations, and reckless building by urban "developers." The opposition to the destruction of the Piñones coastal and mangrove area in Loíza and the displacement of its communities by a housing and tourist project (named Costa Serena by its promoters); the fight against the seaside building complex Paseo Caribe, near old San Juan; the struggle against the destruction of Playuela in Aguadilla, and the displacement of its community by a hotel and casino project (Christopher Columbus Landing Resort); the defense of the Isla Verde beach in Carolina against the encroachment by hotel operations. All are examples of the many past and ongoing efforts to defend the island's coasts from the blind pursuit of private profit.

In the energy field, movements in Puerto Rico have fought pollution by oil-burning electrical plants, while blocking the construction of a coal-fueled plant in Mayaguez in the early 1990s. But the movement was not able to stop the construction of a privately-owned coal-burning plant in Guayama, which operates under a contract with the state-owned Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority. The toxic ashes generated by it are transported across the southern coast to a land-fill in Peñuelas. The struggle by the communities directly affected by this and the fight to close the plant in Guayama have been key environmental battles in recent years. Meanwhile, the government and allied private interests have pushed both gas and incineration of trash as alternative energy sources (and as an alternative form of waste management in the case of incineration). The proposed shift to gas included the construction of a north-south pipeline which would have destroyed agricultural and forest areas right through the center of the island. The project generated growing opposition leading to mass protest marches and had to be abandoned. The project to build an incineration plant in the north coast near Barceloneta is stalled, due to the persistent protests and lawsuits led and promoted by community and environmental activists. The *Queremos Sol* (We Want Sun) project, with the participation of ecological groups and, significantly, of UTIER, the electrical workers' union, has formulated a program for a full transition to renewable energy by 2050.[24] Providing for the completion of this project would be a major contribution of a real GND.

Since the 1980s, different initiatives have mobilized, lobbied, protested, and initiated projects to defend agricultural lands from sprawling suburban expansion and highway construction, while demanding the creation of forest and agricultural protected zones or reserves. In recent years, with little or no government support, dozens of initiatives have promoted the adoption of agro-ecological farming, as steps toward healthier diets and food sovereignty.

The struggle against the occupation of much of the island-municipality of Vieques by the U.S. Navy and its use as an air and naval firing range had a significant ecological component, given the massive environmental impact of such activities. The struggle demanding the thorough clean-up and decontamination of Vieques after the end of Navy activities in 2003 continues to this day. In recent years, educational campaigns and yearly protests have been organized opposing Monsanto's presence in Puerto Rico while demanding government action to support agro-ecological projects and food sovereignty.

These environmental struggles have made use of numerous tactics: pickets, marches, rallies, civil disobedience, lawsuits, presentations in legislative and regulatory agency hearings, educational campaigns and local agricultural, renewable energy, and coastal restoration projects, among others. While discontinuous and loosely coordinated, if at all, these struggles over more than four decades have made environmental and ecological issues an important aspect of public policy debates in Puerto Rico.[25]

Since 2006, the chronic problems of Puerto Rico's colonial economy and their ecological consequences have been aggravated by a punishing economic depression and debt crisis, followed by the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Maria.

Perfect Storm: Colonial, Economic and Ecological Crisis

Puerto Rico's economy grew rapidly after World War II, without shedding its colonial nature. This was not exceptional: the world capitalist economy went through a period of expansion between the end of the war and the early 1970s. Puerto Rico's participation in that expansion was shaped by several factors.

In 1947, the government of Puerto Rico adopted a policy of tax exemption in order to attract U.S. investment. This made Puerto Rico attractive enough, since U.S. corporations in Puerto Rico were

also exempt from federal taxes on profits. Puerto Rico also had unrestricted access to the U.S. market, plus it offered the lowest wages under the U.S. flag. Tax exemption, access to the U.S. market, and low wages combined, in the context of the postwar boom, to attract investment and to fuel economic expansion, even if it was never able to provide nearly enough employment.

Yet, since the 1990s, the workings of neoliberal globalization and congressional decisions have undermined these three pillars of Puerto Rico's colonial economy. With trade liberalization, Puerto Rico's access to the U.S. market ceased being exceptional.[26] In 1996, Congress began phasing out the federal tax exemption, section 936, which was completed in 2006. Tax exemption was never able to guarantee development or employment. But Congress replaced an inadequate mechanism with nothing. Meanwhile, the same corporate policies that pushed trade liberalization while intensifying competition and exploitation of labor worldwide also included financial deregulation and unfettered speculation. This led to the Great Recession of 2008.

Under the cumulative impact of neoliberal trade policies, the crippling of tax exemption policies by Congress without providing alternatives, and the recession of 2008, Puerto Rico's colonial economy slowed down, stopped growing and then began shrinking. Its average yearly growth withered from 3.82 percent in the 1990s to 0.71 percent between 2000 and 2009 and then to negative 0.56 percent between 2010 and 2016.[27] Puerto Rico's economy has not grown since 2006 (with a very mild exception in 2012). It has shrunk about 1 percent annually since 2005.[28] More than 250,000 jobs have been lost since 2006; 20 percent of the jobs that existed a dozen years ago have vanished. Over two decades, manufacturing jobs in particular collapsed from 180,000 in the mid-1990s to less than 70,000 today.

As government revenues stagnated or fell, successive administrations had several options: reconsider the tax privileges of U.S. corporations, apply austerity measures, or issue more debt.[29] In 2009, a 4 percent excise tax on sales by local subsidiaries to their international parent companies was imposed. Even this limited measure has generated around $2 billion annually or close to 20 percent of Puerto Rico's government revenues: testimony to the magnitude of the profits generated or declared in Puerto Rico. The fact that ten companies pay around 90 percent of this tax indicates how fragile Puerto Rico's economy is and how vulnerable it is to the decisions of a handful of private interests.

But the emphasis was not in increased corporate taxes. Instead of reconsidering its economic strategy, including tax exemptions, the government began a series of austerity measures while issuing more debt. The former included new sales taxes (in 2006, increased in later years), mass government layoffs, attacks on public sector labor rights, and reduced public employment through attrition (90,000 jobs eliminated since 2006).

Meanwhile, public debt (central government and public corporations) grew 64 percent between 2006 and 2014, from $43 to $73 billion. Puerto Rico's debt was attractive to investors since it is exempt from municipal, state, and federal taxes. Even after Puerto Rico's debt was degraded to junk or non-investment status in February 2014, investors bought $3.4 billion in bonds issued a month later. Needless to say, Wall Street brokers made millions in commissions by issuing $30 billion in new debt since 2006.

Inevitably, servicing the growing debt demanded an increasing portion of the public budget. Meanwhile, electrical and other infrastructure was mismanaged and allowed to deteriorate, often to generate support for privatization. By 2014 Puerto Rico was spending more servicing its debt than financing its public school system.

Debt Crisis and PROMESA

In June 2015, the governor of Puerto Rico admitted that Puerto Rico's debt was, as he put it, "un-payable." It was evident that Puerto Rico's debt would have to be renegotiated. A year later, Congress adopted the Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Stability Act (PROMESA). PROMESA created a non-elected, federally-appointed control board, with broad powers over Puerto Rico's state finances. It provides no funds or measures for economic recovery. It enables austerity policies that deepen poverty while perpetuating the present depression. In other words, it is antidemocratic, colonial, socially unjust, and economically counterproductive.

Board plans have followed the neoliberal script: the debt crisis is attributed to "big government," and economic stagnation to excessive regulation and to "over-generous" labor benefits. The cures follow from this diagnosis: cutbacks in government spending, privatization, attacks on labor rights and benefits.[30]

Nevertheless, it was evident that, even in the scenario most favorable to the creditors, Puerto Rico's debt would have to be restructured. PROMESA thus provided for a temporary stay of creditor suits against the government of Puerto Rico. As no agreement was reached with the creditors in the time allowed by the stay (May 1, 2017), the board took action under Title III of PROMESA, which allows it to file a bankruptcy-like plea in federal court on behalf of the government of Puerto Rico. The renegotiation of Puerto Rico's debt now proceeds under the supervision of Judge Laura Taylor Swain of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

What Puerto Rico Needs

Instead of a socially regressive, colonial agenda, Puerto Rico urgently needs an adequately funded program of economic reconstruction (including the transition to renewable energy) and a process of decolonization and national self-determination. A truly comprehensive GND should contribute significantly to both objectives.

An alternative program to the punitive neo-liberal agenda imposed on Puerto Rico in recent years should seek to:

> Revoke PROMESA.
>
> Maintain the stay on the claims by creditors on Puerto Rico's public debts.
>
> Audit and annul the illegitimate portion of the debt.[31] Renegotiate the remainder with three priorities: protecting pensions, maintaining essential public services, and retaining resources required for economic renewal.[32]
>
> Declare a moratorium on all debt payments until the audit has been completed.
>
> Adopt an economic reconstruction plan centered on reinvesting profits generated in the island that must include a reconsideration of the tax exemption policies.
>
> Stop austerity and privatization measures and revoke recent labor law "reforms."
>
> Democratically reform the public sector with labor and citizen participation.
>
> Self-initiate a process of decolonization and self-determination through a constitutional status convention.
>
> Seek and obtain sizable funding from Congress for Puerto Rico's economic reconstruction as well as action for Puerto Rico's decolonization.

The struggle for a GND in the United States needs to incorporate the final demand, thus linking the fight for climate action and justice in the United States with the struggle for decolonization and for economic and ecological reconstruction in Puerto Rico.

There are many examples in the past of such collaboration between progressive movements in Puerto Rico and the United States, from the links of the insurgent CIO with Puerto Rico's similarly renewed labor movement in the late 1930s and early 1940s, to the support in the United States for the mass mobilizations and activism in Puerto Rico that forced the U.S. Navy out of Vieques.[33]

In 1936, in the midst of the Great Depression and at a moment of deep crisis of the colonial regime in Puerto Rico, radical Congressman Vito Marcantonio introduced a bill granting independence to Puerto Rico under just and favorable conditions. The bill recognized the "responsibility" of the United States "for the present disastrous situation of [the] Puerto Rican economy and the poverty of the people of Puerto Rico." It provided for the "free entry" of Puerto Rican products into the United States and "no immigration restrictions on Puerto Rican citizens" and it committed the United States to pay "any claims of indemnity which… Puerto Rico may make." [34]

In fact, the original New Deal sponsored by Roosevelt's administration propitiated the creation of an ambitious federally funded program for the economic reconstruction in Puerto Rico: the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA), organized in 1935, which bears reexamination in the present context.

Sugar and the New Deal

In the 1930s, the U.S. sugar market was supplied by domestic beet and cane sugar producers (Western states and Louisiana and Florida, respectively) and outlying cane-sugar producers, including U.S. territories (Hawaii, the Philippines and Puerto Rico) and Cuba. All enjoyed unrestricted access to the U.S. market, with the exception of Cuba, which paid 80% of the tariff levied on foreign raw sugar. As the world price of raw sugar fell through the 1920s, the U.S. Congress responded with successive tariff hikes, seeking to ease the blow on U.S. producers. But expanded U.S. production still resulted in falling prices. Plus, producers in the Philippines and Puerto Rico took best advantage of the increased tariff and conquered a greater share of the U.S. market. Higher tariffs excluded a growing portion of Cuban sugar from the U.S. market, adding economic hardship to the political discontent with the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado, an explosive combination that led to the Cuban revolution of 1933, which initially had a radical anti-imperialist component.[35] Late 1933 and early 1934 was also a moment of widespread, often violent, working class and consumer (against gasoline and electric power companies) mobilizations in Puerto Rico.[36] Meanwhile, U.S. beet interests were pushing for Philippine independence, as a way of excluding a competitor from the U.S. market.[37]

By early 1934, the Roosevelt administration had to simultaneously address the crisis in the sugar industry, due to falling prices; the demand of the beet interests for protection from competition by the insular territories (including Puerto Rico); the need to redefine the relationship with the Philippines, to appease social and labor unrest in Puerto Rico, and to defuse the revolutionary situation in Cuba. The "American Sugar Kingdom," as Cesar Ayala has referred to it, required major and urgent reengineering.[38]

The Sugar Act, adopted in February 1934 was a central component of its response to this situation.[39] It imposed a processing tax on refiners and mill owners to finance payments to beet and cane growers to reduce production. It created a quota system which allotted a portion of the market to each producing state and territory to Cuba. Given the Congressional might of the beet states and the need to ameliorate the situation in Cuba, U.S. colonies, namely the Philippines and Puerto Rico, bore

the brunt of the required reduction in raw sugar production. Puerto Rico's quota was 20 percent short of its projected 1934 harvest of one million-plus tons. In this context, reform minded New Dealers managed to include a provision in the Sugar Act allowing for the use of the processing tax to finance, not only individual payments, but for programs for the general benefit of agriculture.[40] This led to the appointment by President Roosevelt of a Puerto Rico Policy Commission entrusted with the task of devising such a program for the island. Puerto Rican critics of U.S. corporate control, land-ownership concentration, and the sugar monoculture quickly understood that they could now seek some of the desired reforms within the framework of the New Deal and the need to reduce sugar production.

In June 1934, the Puerto Rico Policy Commission delivered its landmark *Report*, popularly known as the Chardón Plan.[41] The document was an implicit critique of the social consequences of economic development led by market forces: it proposed a "fundamental reconstruction" of Puerto Rico's economy through the replacement of "blind development" with a "fundamental plan." As a student of planning in Puerto Rico has pointed out, the Chardón Plan "is one of the technically best formulated documents in the history of planning in Puerto Rico."[42] After considerable delays, President Roosevelt created the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) through Executive Order 7057, on May 28, 1935.

The PRRA, following the indications of the Chardon Plan, sought to redistribute land, diversify production, operate mills as public corporations, electrify, and build other infrastructure. [43] Congress initially appropriated $35 million to finance its operations. By 1936, the PRRA directly or indirectly employed around 50,000 persons, a number close to half the labor force of the sugar industry during harvest time. Organized in 1935, it operated until 1954, although its most significant work was carried out through the first decade of its existence. The PRRA brought two sugar mills (Lafayette in Arroyo and Los Caños in Arecibo). It first attempted to run their cane-growing operations as cooperatives, but later turned them over to large cane growers (*colonos*) operating under contract with the government-owned mills. It bought close to 40,000 acres which it turned into 11,000 farms or homesteads. (This fell short of the original Chardon Plan, which envisaged the acquisition of 76,000 acres in the sugar cane areas alone and the creation of 24,000 small farms around the island.) The PRRA undertook the reforestation of 22,000 acres. It appointed legal counsel to assist Puerto Rico's Attorney General pursue court action to enforce legislation limiting corporate landholdings in Puerto Rico to 500 acres.[44]

The PRRA also engaged in the construction and rehabilitation of public infrastructure and buildings. Over the years it constructed 25 agricultural vocational schools and 125 medical dispensaries. It built new schools and repaired existing rural and municipal schools. It built the theater of the University of Puerto Rico, to this day one of the island's best indoor venues, as well as the iconic tower of the university's campus in Rio Piedras. The PRRA engaged in urban renewal, building Puerto Rico's first low cost housing project, located in Puerta de Tierra, near old San Juan, which bore the Fourierist name of El Falansterio. To carry out its projects, the PRRA built a cement factory in Cataño, across the bay from San Juan. Electrification, and rural electrification, in particular, was a key aspect of the PRRA's activity. It relied on the development of hydro-electric power. It modernized and expanded the existing dam and generating facilities of Toro Negro in Villalba and built new ones in Carite in Guayama, Las Garzas, and Dos Bocas in Arecibo and Toro Negro #2 in Villalba.

Beyond the New Deal

It would be wrong to propose a mechanical imitation of the PRRA in the 21st century. Nor can the GND simply be a new "greener" version of the original New Deal. The PRRA had some admirable aspects. It recognized the negative consequences of "blind development" led by capitalist profit and

market imperatives: concentration of property and wealth; monoculture and dependence on food imports; chronic mass unemployment and low wages; widespread poverty and external control of productive assets.[45] And it sought to address them through conscious, planned public intervention, in contrast to the laissez-faire tenets prevailing before 1929 and the neo-liberal dogmas dominant today. Through it Congress did provide a significant amount of resources to finance economic reconstruction in Puerto Rico. The original $35 million dollar appropriation would amount to more than $600 million today.

But there were problems as well. First, the PRRA retained a colonial structure as a U.S. agency, ultimately directed by Federal appointees in Puerto Rico or from Washington. It was a federal project or agency in Puerto Rico, not a Puerto Rican project or agency. Secondly, it was more often than not presented as a gift or rescue of Puerto Rico by the United States, and not as it should have been: a compensation or reparation for the consequences of three decades of U.S. colonial rule. Thirdly, most Puerto Rican New Dealers at the time envisaged a two-stage process: economic reconstruction through the PRRA and other programs would be followed in due time by a transition to political independence. But by the early and mid-1940s, the most significant sector in this current, grouped in the Partido Popular Democrático and led by Luis Muñoz Marín, opted to first postpone and then abandon the objective of independence. They eventually settled for a reformed colonial relationship, the existing Commonwealth status, established in 1950-52. Finally, the New Dealer's perspective, while questioning the worst consequences of *laissez-faire* capitalism, still clung to the fundamental structures of capitalism and was unwilling to question or challenge the prerogatives of capital. As they moved away from the search for political independence and settled for colonial reform, Muñoz and the Puerto Rican New Dealers turned to private capital and foreign investment as the means for Puerto Rico's modernization: land distribution was discontinued; state-owned industries (such as the cement factory build by the PRRA) were privatized; export promotion replaced attempts to localize production. Through tax exemption, access to the U.S. market and relatively low wages Puerto Rico was hitched to the capitalist postwar boom. The results were not insignificant: Puerto Rico escaped extreme poverty. But the problems of one-sided underdevelopment, mass unemployment, external control of the insular economy, and surplus extraction have persisted to this day, while ecological destruction has spread and accelerated. As a result Puerto Rico today faces urgent 21st century problems, such as the transition to renewable energy sources, while still confronted with the problems posed and debated in the 1930s.

Today we must demand a GND that provides for Puerto Rico's economic and ecological reconstruction. Programs related to this must be formulated and coordinated in Puerto Rico and they should be coupled with a process of decolonization. Such an economic, ecological, and political project must abide by the guideline: people and nature before profits. In other words, it must be willing to sacrifice capitalist profits and bend market rules to guarantee the satisfaction of human needs and to protect nature. That, of course, should also be the watchword of the GND in the United States. Progressives in the United States and Puerto Rico should fight together for their shared objectives, adopting what was valid in the first New Deal while opening a path beyond it toward an ecosocialist alternative to capitalist catastrophe.[46]

Notes

1. There is a vast literature on capitalism and the environment. See for example: John Bellamy Foster, Fred Magdoff, *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism. A Citizen's Guide to Capitalism and the Environment* (New York: Monthly Review, 2011); John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Revolution. Making Peace with the Planet* (New York: Monthly Review, 2009); Daniel Tanuro, *Green Capitalism: Why it Can't Work* (London-Amsterdam: Merlin, Resistance, IIRE, 2013).

2. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology. Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review, 1999).

3. Marxist theory of capitalist crisis is admittedly an issue of considerable debate. For an analysis of the 2008 crisis see Andrew Kliman, T*he Failure of Capitalist Production. Underlying Causes of the Great Recession* (London, Pluto Press, 2012). For a discussion of crisis and long depressive periods see Ernest Mandel, *Long Waves of Capitalist Development. A Marxist Interpretation* (London: Verso, 1995).

4. Ashley Dawson, "A greener New Deal?," *New Politics*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, Winter 2019.

5. Pablo Gluzmann, Martin Guzman, Joseph E. Stiglitz, "An Analysis of Puerto Rico's debt: relief needs to restore debt sustainability," *Espacios Abiertos*, 2018) 51.

6. As Michael Löwy has underlined, the need to separate real from false needs and to reduce all unnecessary production requires the suppression of the advertising industry. True needs would be those "that can be expected to persist without the benefit of advertising." Michael Löwy, "Ecology and Advertising" in *Ecosocialism. A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe* (Chicago: Haymarket 2015), 41-51.

7. The point is well argued in Daniel Tanuro, *Green Capitalism…*; Ashley Dawson "A Greener New Deal?"; Mark Burton, Peter Sommerville "Degrowth: a defence," *New Left Review*, 115, Jan-Feb 2019, 95-104; Erald Kolasi, "Energy, Economic Growth and Ecological Crisis," *Monthly Review*, Vol. 71, Issue 2 (June 2019)

8. Löwy, "Ecosocialism and Democratic Planning" in *Ecosocialism*, 35; "Why Ecosocialism: For a Red-Green Future" (December 2018).

9. Löwy "Ecosocialism and Planning," 19-39.

10. Vaios Triantafyllou, "John Bellamy Foster on the Green New Deal" (February 12, 2019)

11. Richard Seymour, "What's the Deal with the Green Deal?" (April 27, 2019)

12. Richard Seymour, "What's the Deal with the Green Deal?" (April 27, 2019)

13. Dawson, "A Greener New Deal?"; Peter Hudis, "The Green New Deal: Realistic Proposal or Fantasy?" (May 26, 2019)

14. The point is forcefully made in Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Simon and Schuster, 2014).

15. We argued this in our review of Klein's *This Changes Everything*: "Capitalismo fósil" (October 24, 2014).

16. The most important is Downes v. Bidwell, 182 U.S. 244 (1901).

17. On Puerto Rico's economic, political and cultural history under U.S. rule see: César J. Ayala, Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: a History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 2006). More on Puerto Rico's economic history in James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) and *Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

18. Total employment in Puerto Rico, 1950: 603, 000; 1963: 586,000. Ayala, Bernabe, 195.

19. Lara Merling, Kevin Cashman, Jake Johnston, Mark Weisbrot, "Life after Debt in Puerto Rico:

How Many More Lost Decades?" (Washington D.C.: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2017), 9.

20. Rafael Bernabe "Isla desechable" (September 14, 2012).

On this topic see: Heather Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow. The Hidden Life of Garbage* (New Press, 2005).

21. Ashley Dawson, *Extreme Cities. The Peril and Promise of Cities in the Age of Climate Change* (London: Verso, 2017).

22. Rafael Bernabe "La isla extrema (o su resiliencia y la nuestra)" (December 1, 2017)

23. As usual, the apologists of capitalist development posed the problem as a choice between the environment and jobs. See for example, Alex W. Maldonado, "Las minas de cobre," *El Mundo*, January 4, 1968. The struggle led to pioneering environmentalist statements, such as the document prepared by Tomás Morales and José del Castillo and signed by sixty scientists and educators entitled "An Urgent Call to Our Government. An Urgent Warning to Our People," *San Juan Star*, January 31, 1966. This had been preceded by a letter by Morales published in the *New York Times* (January 8, 1966) under the title "Despoliation in Puerto Rico." On the birth of the environmental movement in Puerto Rico see: Carmen M. Concepción, "The Origins of Modern Environmental Activism in Puerto Rico in the 1960s" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 19, 1, March 1995, 112-128 and Jorge Colón Rivera, Félix Córdova Iturregui, José Córdova Iturregui, *El proyecto de explotación minera en Puerto Rico (1962-1968): Nacimiento de la conciencia ambiental moderna* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 2014).

24. Queremos Sol. UTIER stands for Unión de Trabajadores de la Industria Eléctrica y Riego.

25. The Puerto Rican left and independence movements have played a central role in ecological struggles. For example, as early as 1974, when much of the world left was beginning to grapple with these issues, the program of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (a major organization of the left at the time) pointed out that, socialism requires "the strictest environmental planning," in order to avoid "the destruction of the environment and of natural resources." "Equilibrium" had to be found between human needs, production and nature. Oil in particular, had to be replaced by "less polluting" sources of energy: such as the sun, the wind, sea waves and marine currents. Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño, *La alternativa socialista. Tesis Política* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Puerto Rico, 1974) 20, 119, 125.

26. Some steps in that process of trade liberalization were the adoption of North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that went into effect in 1994 and the launching of the WTO in 1995.

27. Merling, Cashman, Johnston, Weisbrot, 5

28. Merling, Cashman, Johnston, Weisbrot, 6.

29. Tax revenue fell in real terms since 2005. See José Caraballo Cueto, Juan Lara, "From deindustrialization to unsustainable debt: the case of Puerto Rico" (2016), 12.

30. Rafael Bernabe "Punitive Neoliberalism in Puerto Rico," *Against the Current*, 191 (Nov.-Dec. 2017).

31. In 2015 the government of Puerto Rico created a Commission for the Comprehensive Audit of the Public Credit. It was largely ignored by Governor García Padilla's administration and dissolved by the following Roselló administration. It managed to prepare two preliminary reports on central

government bond issues since 2014 and Electric Power Authority bonds issued in 2013. Both found irregularities that make more than $30 billion in debt illegal. The initial report in: Commission for the Comprehensive Audit of the Public Credit. For the first pre-audit report, see here. For the second pre-audit report, see here.

32. The 2017 study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research concluded that "there is a substantial case for federal aid to Puerto Rico, as well as sufficient debt cancellation, to allow for speedy economic recovery." Merling, 6. Before Hurricane María, a study by Joseph E. Stiglitz and two associates concluded that to attain "debt sustainability" (debt that could be paid while allowing for economic recovery) would require cutting Puerto Rico's debt by at least 62 percent and perhaps as much as 80 percent. In December 2017, Martín Guzmán, one of the authors of the study, concluded that after Hurricane María, *all* of Puerto Rico's debt would have to be cancelled. See Pablo Gluzmann, Martin Guzman, Joseph E. Stiglitz, "An Analysis of Puerto Rico's debt: relief needs to restore debt sustainability," *Espacios Abiertos*, 2018, 2, 3, 5). "Paying bondholders not viable" Joanisabel González, *Nuevo Día*, English web version, 12 December 2017.

33. Taller de Formación Política, *No estamos pidiendo el cielo: la huelga portuaria de 1938* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1988). Katherine T. McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

34. "A Bill to Provide for the Granting of Sovereignty to the Island of Puerto Rico, and to Provide for Neighborly Relations with the Proposed Government of Puerto Rico" (H.R. 12611, 74th Congress, 2nd Session.) Introduced by Representative Marcantonio (R-NY), May 6 1936.

35. The Roosevelt administration never recognized the "100-day" government (September 1933-January 1934) headed by Ramón Grau, whose cabinet included radical anti-imperialist Antonio Guiteras.

36. Taller de Formación Política, *Huelga en la caña* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1982); Rafael Bernabe, "Luchas obreras 1933-34," *Pensamiento Critico*, Ano XII, num. 63, mayo-julio 1989.

37. See Grayson L. Kirk, *Philippine Independence: Motives, Problems and Prospects* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936).

38. Cesar Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom. The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898-1934* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

39. See John E. Dalton, *Sugar. A Case Study of Government Control* (New York: Macmillan, 1937).

40. "It became apparent to the Administration that Puerto Rico's market quota, 803,000 tons of sugar, checking the future growth of its most important industry and bringing a reduction in output of about 20%, would mean serious hardship to the island." Dalton, 218.

41. *Report of the Puerto Rico Policy Commission* (June 14, 1934). The members of the commission were Carlos Chardón, Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico; Rafael Fernández García, of the UPR agricultural extension service and Rafael Menéndez Ramos, Commissioner Agriculture.

42. Leonardo Santana Rabell, *Planificación y política durante al administración de Luis Muñoz Marín: un análisis crítico* (San Juan: Análisis, 1984), 48.

43. Our summary relies on Miles H. Fairbank, *The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 1934-1954* (San Juan: The Fairbank Corporation, 1978).

44. The limit had been in effect since 1900, but had not been enforced. Attorney Miguel Guerra Mondragón was entrusted with this task.

45. The PRRA commissioned a landmark report on the consequences of the sugar monoculture. Esteban Bird, *Report on the sugar industry in relation to the social and economic system of Puerto Rico* (1937) (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1941).

46. We have advocated for such internationalist collaboration in the past, for example in the wake of Hurricane María and responding to attacks by President Trump. See Rafael Bernabe, Manuel Rodríguez Banchs, “Open Letter to the People of the United States, a Month After Hurricane María” (October 20, 2017)