

Puerto Rico: People Are in the Streets Against Sexism, Homophobia, Austerity and Corruption

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*A political scandal recently pushed thousands of Puerto Rican people into the streets to march under the catchword 'Ricky Renuncia!', Ricardo, quit! - **Ricardo Rossello** is the island's current governor.*

On 11 July 2019, an anonymous source published personal messages from the governor's Telegram account (a crypted application similar to Whatsapp). Two days later, the *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo* (Centre for Investigative Journalism) in Puerto Rico published them on line, thus exposing messages that are marked by misogyny and homophobia, and place him in line with Donald Trump. Two of the senders immediately resigned, including State Secretary Luis Rivera Marín. But his was not enough to appease the wrath of the people.

Marches reached a peak on Wednesday 17 July, with close to 100,000 people in the streets of San Juan, the island's capital city, when the consortium of journalists exposed a 'network of embezzlement of several millions dollars', involving several public companies.

Since 2016, Puerto Rico is supervised by a Financial Oversight Board that was set up by the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act, adopted when Obama was president. **The object of the board consisting of non-elected delegates is to outline a schedule to repay the island's creditors (mainly major US investment funds) and implement radical austerity policies**, including closure of schools, huge cuts in pensions and no investment at all in the local economy, infrastructures or social policies.

It was in this context, which is a perfect illustration of Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine, that the island was hit twice in a row by devastating hurricanes that killed over 3,000 people and destroyed the power network. It took 11 months for power to be restored over the whole island, which sharply increased the number of death casualties as a result of the hurricanes, bad maintenance of the network, and disastrous choices in the management in the crisis. The revelations by the consortium of journalists largely confirm this last element.

To restore the power network, the public company PREPA (Puerto Rican Electric Power Authority) first contracted with a company that had no experience whatsoever but that was well connected with the secretary of the Ministry for Home Affairs, Ryan Zinke. The contract was eventually cancelled and a new contract was signed with a company related to the fossil energy giant Mammoth Energy Services, despite the fact that the geographical situation of the island and its exposure to hurricanes have amply demonstrated that Puerto Rico needs to rely on the local production of renewable energy.

Ricardo Rossello will probably not be able to withstand this wave of discontent. His political

adversaries are preparing an impeachment. But this will not undo what has happened and will not change the programme set up by the Financial Oversight Board, which will continue with austerity policies, to the greater benefit of the island's creditors who make huge profits. The hurricane season is just starting.

Let us remember that [the CADTM international network went to Puerto Rico in December 2018](#) and that a most successful set of events had been organized by our local partner, the Citizens' front to audit the debt.

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