

The Struggle to Defend One of the Largest Universities of Brazil

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The existence of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) is threatened by a politics of the government that sees it quite openly as an impediment to its elitist and privatizing aims. UERJ is one of the largest universities of Brazil, distinguished at the national and international level as much by its policy of openness to the poor population as by the volume of exchanges that it produces. The situation is not new - for at least ten years, professors, students, and employees have been fighting for the maintenance of a public, popular, free, and high quality UERJ - but it has worsened enormously since 2016. The much-vaunted "absence of resources" of the State for the financing of the university has since concealed the fact that any economic management is primarily political. Moreover, it appears to make UERJ a kind of "trial balloon" for much more general aspirations of privatization in the fields of education and health. "I am you tomorrow," an old (and frightening) advertisement once said. In this sense, in calling upon persons and institutions not only in Rio de Janeiro but also in the whole of Brazil and the international community to struggle together to resist the "dismantling" of the public university, UERJ also seeks to show how much the situation it has experienced is a condensation of forces that configure contemporary neoliberal biopolitics.

Founded in 1950, UERJ is one of the cultural patrimonies of the state of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. With an enormous headquarter in the center of the city of Rio de Janeiro (the Maracanã campus) and 13 external units that include various medical facilities (among them one of the largest and best hospitals of the state), regional campuses in various municipalities, a topnotch school of basic education, and the Open University for the Elderly (UnATI), UERJ brings together more than 7,000 full-time employees, more than 1,000 contracted employees, and more than 40,000 students from basic education to graduate school.

Beyond the volume and quality of its services, jobs, and education, UERJ is characterized by its commitment to cultural diversity and anti-poverty movements. It is proud to have been the first public university of Brazil to adopt a quota system (today covering nearly 30% of the student body) and routinely welcoming the most diverse social, political, and scientific movements. Thus, it establishes alliances that irradiate a certain culture: one committed to struggles for freedom and for democracy in our country.

In spite of all of this, the government of the state of Rio de Janeiro prioritizes a policy of scrapping UERJ by trying to make it starve to death, so to speak. The students who depend on scholarships (around 10,000) have not been receiving the payments that are owed to them and permit them to in fact attend the university by covering costs of transportation, food, and educational materials. Professors and tenured employees, including retirees, already live with enormous delays and/or the fragmentation of salaries (in August they added up to four delayed salaries). The professors with temporary contracts remain months on end without remuneration and outsourced technicians are always under the threat of not receiving their

salaries and losing their jobs. Potential research scholarships won by faculty members under the responsibility of the (also scrapped?) Research Institute in Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) also experience delays without any justifications on the part of the responsible bodies.

It is therefore worth reiterating that the situation experienced by UERJ today goes along with, on the one hand, the directives of a government that disdains public services destined to the population. At the same time, this government invests in spurious alliances granting fiscal exemptions to businesses without any social relevance and guaranteeing high revenues to financial and business groups that support it. On the other hand, the neglect to which the university finds itself currently subjected only prolongs, albeit with an exponential intensity, the politics maintained for 10 years by the same group that today governs the state of Rio de Janeiro - aligned, by the way, with the central leadership of UERJ until 2015. This politics led the university confronted with large internal movements to switch to the tendency to dismantling, to precarization, and to privatization.

However, with the indispensable support of all of those who defend a public, popular, free, and high quality university, UERJ resists!