

Union Movement Rallies in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Workers

by James Parks, Oct 15, 2009



Thousands of workers rallied in Puerto Rico against the governor's drastic layoffs. The sign says "Give me back my job."

In states across the country, working people marched and rallied in solidarity today with their Puerto Rican brothers and sisters against **draconian budget cuts** and cancellation of their collective bargaining rights.

As 200,000 people march in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to protest Gov. Luis Fortuño's plan to slash the budget deficit on the backs of workers, AFL-CIO President **Richard Trumka** sent a letter of support and solidarity and rallies were held in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities.

In his letter of support, which was read at the San Juan rally, Trumka said:

We are fully aware of the attacks being afflicted on the workers and their families on your island and we will do whatever we can to stop them. We are completely committed to bringing the full force of the AFL-CIO to fighting for the rights and well being of our affiliated unions, their members, and the people of Puerto Rico.

Using recently passed legislation known as Public Law 7, Fortuño plans to lay off as many as 30,000 public employees and deny collective bargaining to the remainder of the island's public workers. The U.S. commonwealth, where unemployment is already at 15 percent, is set to receive \$6 billion in federal economic recovery funds, more than enough to cover a projected \$3.2 billion budget deficit.

Trumka's letter goes on to say:

At times like these—and especially at times like these—the people of Puerto Rico need a strong public sector, not a weaker one. We need the government to step in and push the economy forward, not further weaken it. Laying off public servants, particularly at the scale that the governor is planning, is not only anti-worker, it will set back national efforts towards an economic recovery.

Jose Rodriguez Baez, president of the Puerto Rico Federation of Labor, told the crowd:

Today's march is a clear demonstration of opposition to the government's policies. Puerto Rico is unified in repudiation of the lay-offs of more than 30,000 public sector workers, the elimination of collective bargaining agreements and policies that promote privatization.

AFSCME President Gerald McEntee, whose union represents many of the Puerto Rican public employees, in his prepared remarks, told the San Juan rally:

We must tell the governor: Cutting jobs hurts Puerto Rico by crippling public services. Cutting jobs hurts Puerto Rico by putting added pressures on the economy. Cutting jobs means more families without a paycheck. Cutting jobs means less money circulating. Cutting jobs means less tax dollars in the treasury.

We are not going to roll-over. We are not going to give up. We are not going to stand by while Gov. Fortuño cuts vital services and our members' jobs.

Some things are too important to sacrifice. Some things are too precious to give away. The future of Puerto Rico is too important and too precious.

The Office and Professional Employees (**OPEIU**) union had more than 200 members at the rally.

The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (**LCLAA**), an AFL-CIO **constituency group**, joined with AFSCME, OPEIU, SEIU and other unions to bring the situation in Puerto Rico to the attention of the White House and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Here's LCLAA President Milton Rosado:

We want Governor Fortuño to know that an attack on the workers of Puerto Rico is an attack on all who fight for workers' rights and that we are committed to ensuring that every Latino and Latina activist and trade unionist is aware of it.