# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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### Puerto Rican general strike set for this Thursday

Puerto Rican trade unions are set to go on strike this Thursday. The purpose of the protest strike is to press the government of Luis Fortuño to reverse announced layoffs of 30,000 public employees in addition to the 25,000 employees he has sacked since taking office.

Fortuño claims that he does not have a choice, claiming the law forces him to cut the state budget by $2 billion.

### Bank clerks strike in Brazil

Bank employees in Sao Paulo and Porto Alegre ended a 15-day strike last Thursday following a wage agreement with state-owned Banco do Brasil and Nossa Caixa and with private banks. Workers at another government bank, Caixa Económica Federal in Sao Paulo, did not end their strike.

The union representing the bank clerks accepted a 6 percent wage increase, down from the 10 percent it had demanded.

### Teachers strike in Ecuador

Ecuadorean teachers, on strike since September 14, returned to work on Thursday after negotiating an agreement on new education legislation that would have forced teachers to meet government imposed standards.

Those teachers that had refused to take a government test will continue in their posts, according to the new agreement that was hammered out last week between the head of the National Educator's Union (UNE), Mary Zamora, the nation's vice president, Lenin Moreno, and other government officials.

On Wednesday, hundreds of teachers marched through Quito to protest the new law. The teachers' protest called for a repudiation of the new legislation and for the resignation of Education Minister Raul Vallejo.

### Mexican electrical workers protest company's liquidation

On Sunday morning the government of President Felipe Calderon made a surprise announcement, saying it would liquidate the state-owned electric utility that serves the center of the country, Luz y Fuerza Centro. In response, the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) called for mass protests.

The announcement was made shortly after midnight; moments after over 1,000 police had occupied one of the company's electrical plants in Mexico City. Government officials deny that they intend to privatize the company. At the same time, however, they declared that the government could no longer afford to pay the costs associated with operating the utility and subsidizing industrial customers of electricity. Forty-

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four thousand SME members are to be sacked.

The company was created in 1960 when the government nationalized two US-owned utilities that together owned 19 generating plants in and around Mexico City. In 1985 the utility was split into two separate utilities. In addition to Mexico City, Luz y Fuerza Centro also provides electrical service in the states of Puebla, Morelos and Hidalgo. The company operates five substations.

The police action and the government announcement took place days after the government rejected the results of a union election. The government claims that SME leader Martin Esparza was elected fraudulently. In response, the SME threatened a strike against the utility. On October 1, 15,000 utility workers marched demanding that the government not interfere with the union's internal affairs.

SME leaders declared that they plan to call on other unions to join in a national strike against the closure.

**Worker killed in Missouri industrial accident**

A worker recently recalled from layoff was killed October 7 while performing maintenance on an industrial plastics press at the AC Buckhorn plant in Springfield, Missouri. Springfield Police are investigating whether proper maintenance policies were followed to "lock down" the machine that closed down on 31-year -old Tobby Hall, crushing him.

"There's no way the press can close by itself," said a former employee to KY3 News, who charges that speedups and disregard for safety are responsible for Hall's death. "It will not do it. There's too many safety features on it. This was a human error. That was my biggest fear while I was there, overlooking someone in the press. I told them you've got to pull these molds and do preventative maintenance on it. But in order to do that, that means downtime. It's just a crying shame. Now there's a man that's dead, and his family, he's got three kids, they don't have a father anymore."

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration records reveal that AC Buckhorn was fined in February for five violations and fined again in March for four violations that cost it $3,375.

**California-based medical conglomerate implements layoffs**

Workers at the Fresno, Santa Rosa and South Sacramento, California medical centers of Kaiser Permanente held rallies over the past two weeks to protest the integrated medical giant's decision to ax 1,850 jobs throughout California. The decision comes after the health care company announced second quarter profits at the end of June of $620 million.

Kaiser Permanente launched the cuts because of declining membership in its health plan due to rising unemployment, lower Medicare reimbursement rates and the current debates in Congress over health care legislation. Workers received pink slips without any advanced warning.

The Service Employees International Union decried the layoffs. However, a Kaiser statement declared, "We worked collaboratively with our Labor Management Partnership—of which SEIU is a member—and reached an agreement that reflects our values and the philosophy of the Labor Management Partnership." A Kaiser spokesperson declared: "We believe that this unique agreement and the intensive engagement that led to it more than fulfilled our bargaining obligations. Kaiser Permanente has honored the agreement and expects SEIU-UHW to do the same."

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