

International Workers' Day commemorated around the world

Image not found or type unknown



?International Workers' Day commemorated around the world

Havana, May 1 (RHC)-- International Workers' Day, May 1st, is being commemorated around the world with rallies, marches and, in some countries, protests against neo-liberal economic and anti-labor policies.

Millions of workers and activists gathered in Asia, Africa and Latin America to mark the day with demands that their governments address vital labor issues -- especially during these times of a COVID pandemic.

Workers in Indonesia marked May 1st on Saturday with significantly less-attended marches due to coronavirus restrictions, but thousands still vented their anger at a new law they say harms their rights and welfare.

About 50,000 workers from 3,000 companies and factories took part in traditional May Day marches in 200 cities and districts in Southeast Asia's largest economy, said Said Iqbal, the president of the Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions. However, most rallies are held outside factories or company compounds with strict health protocols, Iqbal said.

Elsewhere in the region, police in the Philippine capital of Manila prevented hundreds of workers belonging to left-wing groups from holding a May Day rally at a public plaza, said protest leader Renato Reyes. A month-long coronavirus lockdown there has been extended by two weeks amid an alarming surge.

In Taipei City in Taiwan, hundreds of protesters marched in the streets to demand better salaries and more secure pensions. Most protesters wore face masks to protect themselves from the virus.

In Indonesia's capital of Jakarta, the epicenter of the national epidemic, authorities have warned labor groups to adhere to social distancing and other health measures, which would significantly reduce crowds, said Jakarta Police spokesperson Yusri Yunus. He added that more than 6,300 police personnel were deployed to secure the capital.

Enraged over the new Job Creation Law, several hundred workers gathered near the national monument, waving colorful flags of labor groups and banners with demands. Others laid tomb effigies on the street to symbolize their hopeless and uncertain future under the new law.

"The Job Creation Law has incredibly buried our hope of a better future," said Riden Hatam Aziz, one of the organizers. They later marched to the Constitutional Court and near the presidential palace compound to demand the repeal of the legislation.

The demonstrators say the law will hurt workers by reducing severance pay, removing restrictions on manual labor by foreign workers, increasing the use of outsourcing, and converting monthly salaries to hourly wages.

President Joko Widodo signed the law in November despite days of protests in many Indonesian cities that turned violent weeks earlier. The act amended 77 previous laws and was intended to improve bureaucratic efficiency as part of efforts by Widodo's administration to attract more investment.

The Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions and dozens of other organizations have filed a legal challenge against the Job Creation Law with the Constitutional Court. "The difficult situation could lead to more strikes and protests this year," Iqbal, the president of the trade union group, said.

Television reports showed hundreds of workers rallying in several other cities, including Makassar. They shouted demands for a raise in minimum wage and relaxed outsourcing rules.

In Manila, protesters gathered briefly at a busy boulevard demanding pandemic cash aid, wage subsidies and COVID-19 vaccines amid rising unemployment and hunger. Some opted to stage protest motorcades to avoid infections.

"Workers were largely left to fend for themselves while being locked down," labor leader Josua Mata said. When workers protest the government's mishandling of the pandemic that led to a massive loss of jobs

and income, authorities suppress their basic right, Mata said.

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III separately led a ceremony in Manila, where about 5,000 workers got their jobs for COVID-19.

In the United States, in the city of Portland, Oregon, the police are preparing for multiple gatherings throughout the city on Saturday. Portland is known for protests on International Workers Day. Many years, the city has seen massive turnouts for the demonstrations.

In 2019, after a peaceful day of protests, a brawl between about 60 supporters of right-wing Patriot Prayer and left-wing Antifa broke out outside the Cider Riot Bar in Northeast Portland. Six men were indicted for felony riot in connection with the brawl. In 2017, a May Day march turned into what police called a riot, and included fires in the street, violence and 25 arrests.

This year, Portland police said there are gatherings planned at Holladay Park, Peninsula Park, Salmon Springs Fountain and Shemanski Park. The Portland police also said there's a planned march or car caravan that could impact downtown traffic in the mid to late afternoon.

In Germany, police are on alert for possible May Day violence. Thousands of officers are on standby as both left- and right-wing protesters are expected on the streets of Germany. May Day is often met with protests, but this year there is increased concern over possible disorder.

While the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) was holding its main rally in Hamburg under the banner "Solidarity is the Future," the main focus for authorities lay elsewhere.

More than 5,000 officers were to be deployed on the streets of Berlin, where past May Day rallies have been accompanied by disorder, particularly after nightfall. Authorities in the German capital were expecting up to 10,000 people to take part in a march through the streets.

An afternoon demonstration by the (Lateral Thinking) group, which opposes the government's coronavirus strategy, is also anticipated in Berlin. Police spokesperson Thilo Cablitz told news agency DPA that officers from across the country would be brought in.

The eastern city of Leipzig has already put a stop to three demonstrations that sought registration, as required under German law. Authorities banned the gatherings due to the pandemic restrictions, yet there were several other demos still under consideration.

Among those banned were a rally by planned by the Third Path party, a right-wing faction, and a cycle convoy organized by the Leipzig 2021 movement which is opposed to the restrictive measures aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus.

Third Path demonstrations were also banned in the eastern cities of Zwickau and Plauen.

In Hanover, police set up protection zones for journalists in response to attacks on reporters in the past by angry Querdenken protesters.



Radio Habana Cuba