

Workers march in May Day demonstrations around the world

Our reporters
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Millions of workers marched in May Day demonstrations around the world Friday, celebrating international proletarian solidarity.

In Greece, 6,000 people marched in a peaceful demonstration in Athens. In central Athens, 4,000 policemen were deployed, as authorities feared a possible replay of the December riots that followed the shooting death of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos. Police fired teargas at a group of demonstrators from Athens Polytechnic, which had been at the center of the December demonstrations.

An estimated 1 million people (450,000 according to police) marched in hundreds of demonstrations in France. The demonstration in Paris drew 165,000 marchers, carrying banners reading “Sarko [President Nicolas Sarkozy] promised us, Sarko lied” and “We won’t pay for the bankers.” (See “France: Up to a million people on May Day protests”)

There were also marches in big cities in Spain, burdened with the highest unemployment rate in Europe — 17 percent. More than 65,000 people, according to organisers, gathered in the centre of Madrid in a demonstration run by the country’s two largest trade unions.

In Italy, union leaders shifted rallies from major cities to the earthquake-stricken town of L’Aquila, as a sign of solidarity with the thousands who have lost their jobs since last month’s deadly quake.

In Germany, the DGB trade union federation mobilised its entire organisation this May Day to proclaim its willingness to work with the government to ensure that the traditional demonstrations proceeded peacefully. However, there were reports of violent clashes and injuries in demonstrations in Berlin and Hamburg.

According to its own figures, the DGB organised around 400 demonstrations and rallies across Germany. Participation at the rallies was increased in a number of cities by large delegations of foreign workers. In Frankfurt, 1,000 Tamils joined the rally to protest the ruthless military action currently being carried out by the Sri Lankan government.

The main event of the DGB took place in the northern port city of Bremen, where DGB chief Michael Sommer addressed a crowd of around 2,500. Sommer repeated his warnings of social unrest, but then offered the cooperation of the trade unions to the government, advising the implementation of new government stimulus programmes.

The German Social Democratic leaders did not speak at the main meeting in Bremen. But SPD chairman Franz Müntefering spoke at the DGB rally in Wuppertal and SPD foreign minister and chancellor candidate Frank-Walter Steinmeier spoke in Ludwigshafen.

The May Day meetings and rallies in Germany have been traditionally used by the trade unions and the SPD to cover their political tracks and talk “left.” But as the financial crisis deepens—and the active role of both organisations in the destruction of jobs, wages and working conditions becomes evident—such a balancing act is becoming increasingly difficult. Despite the rapid growth of unemployment in Germany in the past months the low participation at the rallies in Germany is testimony to the growing credibility crisis of the trade union bureaucracy.

In Russia, 25,000 marchers gathered for rallies in Moscow, led by trade unions and the Russian Communist Party. They rallied around a statue of Karl Marx and called for the resignation of the government. Police arrested 120 marchers at a demonstration in St.

Petersburg.

In Turkey, 2,000 demonstrators marched into Taksim Square, for the first May Day demonstration since the government legalized the holiday last year. Police fired tear gas and water cannon and charged hundreds on the square—the site of a May 1, 1977 massacre of demonstrating workers by unidentified gunmen.

In Pakistan, there were May Day demonstrations in all the major cities in three provinces, including Quetta, Peshawar, Lahore, Multan and Faisalabad.

In Sindh, the Pakistan People's Party-led provincial government banned all May Day demonstrations, using as a pretext the ethnic violence that erupted in Karachi on April 29 and resulted in more than 30 deaths. The People's Labour Bureau, the trade union wing of the PPP, supported the ban.

A Pakistani correspondent told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the demonstrations exemplified mounting popular anger with the Pakistan People's Party, which has long postured as a “pro-poor,” even socialist, party. The PPP-led coalition government that came to power in Islamabad in March 2008 has continued the policies of the former Musharraf dictatorship, eliminating energy price subsidies, pressing forward with privatization, and providing the US with pivotal military-logistical support for the occupation of Afghanistan.

Our correspondent observed that the effect of the ban on the May Day demonstration in Karachi, a multi-ethnic city of 14 million, was to prevent Sindhi, Punjabi, Balochi, Pashtun and Urdu speaking workers from expressing their class solidarity in opposition to the communal politics promoted by all sections of the Pakistani elite.

In the Philippines, 7,000 demonstrators marched in Manila to Mendiola and the US embassy, as police blockaded the streets in central Manila. Protesters denounced President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's offer for the unemployed to join the armed forces, noting that the daily cost of living for a family is pegged at 922 pesos, while the minimum wage is 382 pesos per day. Protesters also held rallies at Olongapo City and Subic Bay.

On the same day, a government-run job fair offered 200,000 overseas jobs in construction, engineering and other work, attracting thousands of applicants in cities across the country.

In South Korea, 16,000 demonstrators converged on the National Assembly in Seoul, demanding job protection, employment and the resignation of conservative President Lee Myung-bak. Several protesters were detained after clashes with riot police.

In India, workers took part in a May Day march in New Delhi protesting job and wage cuts. The protest was organized by the Indian Federation of Trade Unions. Workers all over the southern state of Kerala observed the day, holding marches and meetings.

In Kolkata, the capital of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, workers participated in a May Day rally and meeting. They carried placards denouncing India's foreign policy, imperialism and communalism.

In Chennai, the capital of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, about 2,000 workers participated in a May Day rally and about 3,000 gathered for the meeting at the conclusion of the rally. They were organized jointly by the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), union federations affiliated to two main Stalinist parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—CPM—and the Communist Party of India (CPI) respectively.

Perambur, where the rally and meeting were held, is a working class area in the city. Workers from the Chennai port and docks, as well as railway and municipal workers, bank and insurance workers, rickshaw drivers and workers from various auto manufacturing plants, took part in the rally and meeting. There was also a group of women workers from the unorganized sector. The groups marched under their respective union banners.

Among the slogans workers shouted were: “Long Live May Day,” “Tamil Nadu government, don't attack our trade union rights”, “Long Live the Revolution” and “Price rises are crushing the poor.”



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