

Cebu (Philippines): After being ‘exploited’ in 2020, laborers vow to fight back in 2021

Thursday 31 December 2020, by [PALAUBSANON Michelle L.](#) (Date first published: 31 December 2020).

CEBU, Philippines — Labor group Partido ng Mangagawa predicts that 2021 will see a resurgence of workers’ actions to defend democratic freedoms and labor rights.



Workers in Cebu hit the streets for a mobile rally on Labor Day this year.

“The government ensured labor groups could not protest in the usual way with again COVID as an alibi. With workers’ strikes and street protests effectively banned, Congress railroaded the Anti-Terror Law. But workers are fighting back and are in the frontlines of the struggle to reclaim their right,” PM said in its labor year-ender report.

PM said that capitalists are exploiting the pandemic to bust unions.

For instance, PM-Cebu spokesperson Dennis Derige, in an interview yesterday, cited the case of First Glory, a company based at the Mactan Export Processing Zone in Lapu-Lapu City that terminated around 300 workers last month.

Derige said that the First Glory labor union failed to reach an agreement with management.

“We will have a last-ditch negotiation on January 4, 2021 and if no agreement is reached on that day, then on January 5, 2021 onward, we can go on a strike,” said Derige.

It can be recalled that the First Glory workers have voted overwhelmingly to go on strike in a strike voting held last week.

Cristito Pangan, president of First Glory labor union, said that the management has taken a hardline position in all of the mediation meetings called by the Philippine Export Zone Authority and the National Conciliation and Mediation Board despite being unable to substantiate its claim of losses.

Pangan said they demand that First Glory reinstate all 300 workers that were retrenched as this was done in bad faith and for the purpose of busting the newly-formed union.

Pangan also said that the labor dispute at First Glory is symptomatic of the epidemic of labor rights violations during the time of COVID and employers are exploiting the COVID-19 crisis to bust unions and shift to contract work.

PM added that the aid provided by the government reached only 3 million households but 16 million Filipinos became temporarily jobless during the lockdown.

This year, PM said, 4.5 million are unemployed and 2.2 million more are also out of work but are not officially jobless only because they stopped looking for work.

“The severe lockdown shutdown the economy and left workers and the poor without jobs and livelihood for months on end,” PM added.

To make matters worse, PM said employers used the pandemic as an opportunity to deny workers their benefits and their rights, workers were put on floating status for more than the six months allowed by law.

“Establishments reopened but replaced regular workers with new hires on endo status. Some employers shutdown their firms without paying workers separation and other benefits,” it said.

PM further said that while the pandemic of rights violations spread, the Department of Labor and Employment exercised social distancing from workers as the agency released a series of orders and advisories that denigrated labor standards and rights.

Derige added that they expect more workers at MEPZ to be terminated or retrenched next year. — JMD (FREEMAN)

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<https://www.philstar.com/the-freeman/cebu-news/2020/12/31/2067243/after-being-exploited-2020-laborers-vow-fight-back-2021>