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Pakistan

Telecom workers fight privatisation

- News from around the world -

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Pakistan media have reported that the Pakistan government on Friday (3rd June) postponed the privatisation of Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) for an unspecified period upon which PTCL's Employees Union conditionally called off their strike to negotiate with the management. The union said it would resume its strike if the management did not honour their agreement. Shortly before this development we received the following report on the conduct of this significant action.

Strike enters 7th Day

The PTCL unions strike against privatisation entered its 7th day. Over 62000 workers are taking part in one of the most militant actions by a section of the working class in Pakistan. The 9 unions in the telecommunication sector are all united and have refused to postpone the strike even after offers of over 3 billion rupees in concessions. "The offer is of secondary nature, our main demand is an end to privatisation" says Rana Tahir of the United Action Committee of the telecommunication employees. The Committee is heading the strike.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ptcl.jpg>] PTCL offices empty...

Workers across Pakistan have taken over the telephone offices and the management is not being allowed to enter the buildings. All telephone exchanges are under workers control. The workers have not yet cut off telephone lines, but have refused to work for the services. The result is that thousands of telephones have to wait for repairs.

An information service and telephone operators are working.

There have been sit-ins in all the telephone exchanges. Meetings of thousands of workers have taken place in many parts of the country.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ptclstrikers.jpg>] ..with strikers outside

The workers have threatened that if their demands were not met they would close down all the telephone lines on 6th June. They have also threatened that if any of the workers' leaders is arrested they will immediately shut down all the telephone lines. So far no arrest has been made although police and rangers are deployed at all telephone exchanges.

The government wanted to privatise this profitable company by June 10th. The telecom minister is adamant to go ahead despite the strike but workers are also replying in the same vein.

Labour Party Pakistan organised the first solidarity demonstration on 26th May, the day the strike started in Lahore. Several hundreds of workers came along to participate in the demo. A special edition of the LPP's weekly paper Mazdoor Jeddoujhd is being printed on the issue. A poster explaining 21 reasons to oppose the privatisation is also being printed.

The strike has paralysed the whole plan of the government for privatisation.