

Thursday, August 27, 2009

South Africa: Solidarity with soldiers of SANDU



Yesterday, 26 August, around 2000 rank and file soldiers of the South African National Defence Force, who were members of SANDU, which is their trade union, marched on the Government offices in Pretoria to demand a 30% wage increase. They were met by police who used teargas and rubber bullets against them. Several were arrested and all face suspensions and possible dismissal. (See updates below on the clampdown on the military union.) We reprint the message of solidarity sent by the WIVL to SANDU. Solidarity statements from HRS (US) and CWG (Aotearoa) follow.

[Click above to view HRS statement.]

Workers International Vanguard League condemns in the strongest possible terms the brutal suppression of the soldiers march yesterday to the Union buildings. Soldiers should have the full right to protest as well as the right to strike. It is a disgrace that rank and file soldiers earn such low wages while the officer corp and generals earn huge pay packets, sitting in their comfy armchairs while sending soldiers into life-threatening situations. We fully support the right of soldiers to elect their leaders in the army and that their leaders should be subject to instant recall.

We fully support the demand for a 30% salary increase, a demand which is fully justified and fair. The current Governor of the Reserve Bank recently received a 28% salary increase but he decrees that workers must be 'reasonable' and limit their demands to the 3-6% so called inflation band. In other words, the official inflation is used as a tool to force workers to lower their demands, while actual inflation for workers is much higher than the CPIX. We can see from this that the problems that the soldiers face are the same as the rest of the working class.

We condemn the lukewarm response of the Cosatu leaders to the brutalization of the soldiers yesterday; they only noted 'with concern' the actions of the police, merely describing them as 'excessive'. A true workers leadership would have immediately have called for broader solidarity action from the rest of the working class in support of their demands and have demanded the immediate release of the 2 soldiers who were arrested, and the lifting of the suspension of the protesters. However they are silent. The Cosatu leaders rush to meet the Minister of Defence (Sisulu) instead of meeting with the soldiers and those who have been smashed by the state repressive forces.

On the 28th June there was a military coup in Honduras; well you may ask, what has that to do with the soldiers demands and your protests? The fact is that there is a US military base in Honduras, which means that the Obama regime is involved in the coup. The lesson to be learnt is that imperialism is so desperate to solve its crisis of falling profits that they have to suppress the working class even more; this means that their usual methods of controlling us, through parliament and flowery constitutions, are not enough; they have started a period of greater offensive against the working class, using military coups, police brutality, gangs of hired thugs, etc.

The shooting of protesters in communities, of the municipal strikers for merely tipping over the garbage, here in South Africa is part of the world imperialist attack. The gold mines are owned by the Bank of New York; our Reserve Bank is controlled by JP Morgan Chase. Our economy is mainly controlled by US imperialism. The government is in reality the agent of imperialism here. This is why they guarantee that every year over R200 Bn leaves SA just in declared profits, while the masses live in starvation. This poses immediate challenges for us all. When we meet or organise, can we still operate as before? We need to defend our right to meet, to march, to protest. We need to defend ourselves from the armed attacks of the brutal police and other fascistic agencies.

There is a second major lesson that we need to learn and that is that under these times of crisis of the capitalists, the trade union leaders, such as those of Cosatu, Nactu and Fedusa, close ranks with the capitalist class and act against the interest of workers. At a time that the entire working class should have been on strike for 30% or more increases, the Cosatu leaders persuade workers to lower their demands; they persuade workers not to go on strike, they sign low wage agreements and bind their members, like the municipal unions to 3 year agreements which mean that in the next 2 years their members cannot strike when they receive what is in effect a wage cut.

Even worse, when workers are mobilising to strike, the Cosatu leaders divide the working class by not mobilising any concrete solidarity, and even break ranks to sign for peanuts and weaken the strike, such as when the railway workers went on strike recently (Satawu signed for 8% and abandoned the rest of the workers to strike on their own). The only reason why Cosatu leaders want unions of the soldiers to join them is not to increase working class solidarity, but on the contrary, to use their skills to betray the workers demands and struggles.

The third major lesson to learn is that when SA soldiers are sent to other parts of Africa (Lesotho, DRC, etc), they are being used by the imperialist forces to not only guard their mining and other assets, but to act against the local working class in these respective countries. The war in the DRC has led to over 4 million people being killed; all the imperialists were interested in was not 'peace' for the people, but to rape and plunder as much of the countries resources as possible. Imperialism and their local agent, the SA government, uses you when they need to safeguard the profits of the bosses, but once you have done this, they dump you aside.

To counter the divisive tactics of the SACP-ANC-Cosatu leaders, we need to be better organised, we need to unite with the base of Cosatu and other unions, in action on the ground.

We need to draw the lesson from Madagascar, where the soldiers united en masse with the working class, disobeying their generals order to shoot on worker protests; they took control of the military bases and said loudly and clearly that they are with the people.

What we need are workers and soldiers action committees to defend this current struggle of the soldiers for a living wage and other demands; we need to unite to defend communities for their struggles for jobs for all, for bread, for decent housing for all, for free adequate health care for all; for increasing wages when prices increase. This is the same fight. it is the same fight as the workers in Bolivia and Peru against the imperialist grab of their resources. It is the same fight as the Chinese and Zimbabwean workers against exploitation.

We demand:

- 1. the immediate unconditional release of the 2 arrested soldiers;**
- 2. the immediate lifting of the suspension of all soldier protesters;**
- 3. 30% increase in wage for soldiers and the entire working class; increase the soldiers wage to a minimum of R5000; wages must increase when prices increase;**
- 4. Recognise the soldiers defence unions and the right to strike and protest;**
- 5. Adequate houses for all;**
- 6. Reduce the working week without loss of pay and share all jobs among all those who can work.**
- 7. Down with all military operations by the SANDF in Africa; unite with the working class to defend the masses against the plunder of Anglo American and other gangster monopolies.**

Workers of the world unite; we have nothing to lose but our chains!

Send messages of solidarity to The National Executive of the SANDU, c/o Jeff Dubazana sandu@mweb.co.za ; please cc messages to workersinternational@gmail.com

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