

Sarhwu strikes at the wheels of the apartheid machine

SATS is refusing to even discuss the recognition of SARHWU — the union thousands of railway workers are building. But during the strike, SATS has been forced to negotiate with representatives elected by the railway workers — who are all SARHWU members. A SARHWU worker leader and member of the workers' negotiating team spoke to Cosatu News five weeks into the railway worker strike:



Unemployed white workers fill in where striking railway workers left off

THE workers are very angry. Their feeling is that SATS bosses are being totally unreasonable. If the bosses would rethink their position and negotiate - in a way that is agreeable to workers, and not according to their disciplinary code which we never discussed - then workers would see some fairness. There would

be a chance of a settlement that we all could live with.

But SATS doesn't understand what it means to be reasonable or fair - even though they admit the whole system needs to be revised. I've worked on the railways for 30 years. I've been through the hell of their racist rules and regulations. I know how

stubborn they are. They are like sheep dogs. From birth they try to organise us, lead us, control us. They can never change themselves. We have to change them.

SATS workers never had confidence in the way management and BLATU handled grievances. It is just that we could see no alternative for a long time. But now we have our own union which we are building and we are determined to control.

SATS says BLATU still has membership but they are not near to the workers. When we give them facts about the feelings of workers, they counter with misleading allegations about intimidation and so on. How could a weakly organised union have intimidated 20,000 workers into this kind of action?

SATS says we are free to join unions of our own choice. And when we do they still want to tell us that their bosses union represents us. Really, the time has long past for this kind of nonsense.

This strike was never planned. It just blew up in our faces. Nobody could have dreamed it would come to this. The point is SATS workers everywhere have had enough. We can't tolerate it anymore. When this thing with Andrew happened, it started a flood. All the anger of all the SATS workers is starting to pour out. Who knows where things could go.

SARHWU wants to negotiate in good faith. But the stubbornness of SATS is leaving workers no choice. We have to look for even stronger forms of pressure to force SATS to see reason. I'm talking about the organised pressure and solidarity of other railway workers, COSATU workers and the progressive organisations in the community. We are worried

if negotiations don't take place soon, the thing could get out of control with workers nationally deciding for themselves what to do.

Workers are determined to carry on this struggle. The issue is bigger than Andrew now. We want our union recognised so we can speak for ourselves about all that is wrong at SATS. We need solidarity - from other SATS and COSATU workers.

Sarhwu, Cosatu and the UDF call on

1. All SATS workers, black and white: * To pressure SATS bosses to meet the workers' demands * Join Sarhwu and mobilise for the strongest action possible to back those demands *

2. All workers, employed and unemployed: * To refuse to handle any SATS goods — as Cosatu unions are already doing * Urge your bosses put pressure on SATS to meet the workers' demands * Discuss and encourage solidarity action with the SATS workers *

3. All democratic and freedom-loving people:

discuss, in your youth, community, student and UDF organisations, how to use that power to force SATS to meet the workers' just demands * Expose SATS racism * Organise solidarity committees to back the SATS workers, and mobilise support throughout South Africa.

Unity's the key for public sector workers

WHEN SATS fired Andrew Nedzamba on Friday 13 March for paying in money late, the 500 strong workers strike train at City Deep depot pulled out and started moving.

The following week - when SATS bosses refused to reinstate Andrew unconditionally - workers at Kaserne, Jan Smuts Airport and stations all over the Witwatersrand and Vaal Triangle stopped work and boarded the strike train.

Workers came out in solidarity with Andrew - and added their own demands as well. An end to all racist practices at SATS; the right to be democratically represented by people of their own choice; full pay for the days on strike; recognition of SARHWU.

Over 2 weeks later, with nearly 20,000 SARHWU railway workers now on strike, POTWA post office workers went on strike in Soweto. The workers were striking against the racist and baaskap attitude of Post Office bosses.

Again, the postal strike

spread fast and within 4 days 8,000 postal workers were striking at 14 offices and depots in Johannesburg and Soweto. Again, the postal workers were striking in solidarity with their Soweto comrades and adding their own demands as well. All workers dismissed since November last year (about 50) to be reinstated; black workers must get same transport facilities as other workers; the post office must provide pension payment facilities in Soweto; an end to deductions for being ill.

The railway and postal workers unity, solidarity and fighting spirit have been a great example to all workers. COSATU and UDF affiliates have mobilised community support.

These are the biggest and longest strikes ever to take place in the public service. Thousands and thousands of

postal and railway workers have joined POTWA and SARHWU all over the country during the strike.

Although SATS has recently dismissed the striking railway workers, they are convinced that the struggle can be won with the active solidarity and support of COSATU and the UDF.

In the postal sector, talks are still continuing.

Workers in the public sector have organised their own independent strength and voice in their own organisations. They will need the maximum solidarity from all organised workers in COSATU to force the state to recognise their unions and recognise their demands.

COSATU is presently discussing solidarity action nation-wide with the dismissed SATS workers. Every COSATU worker knows that recognition of the union chosen by the majority of workers is the most basic trade union right.

AN INJURY TO ONE...



IS AN INJURY TO ALL!



ZAPIRO