



CSAAWU

Commercial Stevedoring Agricultural & Allied Workers Union

21 September 2012

A Call for International Solidarity

In the past few weeks we have seen the escalation of attacks on the South African working class by bosses and the state that protects them. We have seen the state massacre workers on strike fighting for a living wage. This is not an isolated instance of attack against the working class but rather an ongoing feature of a system that puts profit before human needs. Structural violence is committed against workers everyday – they are forced to suffer abuse, poverty wages, unemployment, ill health and intolerable living conditions. Brutal repression is used against workers when they stand up against this.

This happens on the mines, in factories, on farms ... CSAAWU, a farm workers' trade union, has come under attack many times from bosses for organizing farm workers. Formed in 2003 to address the appalling working and living conditions faced by farm workers in South Africa, CSAAWU is one of the few unions actively organizing rural workers. Farm workers are some of the most marginalized members of the South African workforce, with unionization rates below 4%, and have historically made the lowest wages in the country. In the last two decades these poverty-level wages have been exacerbated by high job losses, outsourcing and evictions from farms. All of these factors have created a hostile environment in which labour abuses are commonplace and extreme forms of violence and abuse are persistent. While freedom of association and organizational rights are guaranteed under the constitution, farm workers' are yet to enjoy many of these rights. Workers are intimidated and threatened when they join the union, when they build their organization, when they speak out against abuses. Workers are dismissed, evicted, denied electricity and water and verbally abused when they join the union. A 2011 Human Rights Watch Report, *Ripe With Abuse: Human Rights Conditions in South Africa's Fruit and Wine Industries*, detailed the unsafe working conditions, dilapidated housing, and high poverty levels that many workers still face. Nearly two decades after the end of apartheid little has changed for these workers.

A Speak-Out Campaign was launched in November 2011 by CSAAWU and other rural and political organizations (Mawubuye, Trust for Community Outreach and Education, and the Democratic Left Front). At this meeting farm workers and dwellers spoke of the inhumane living and working conditions that they face each and every day. Many of them testified that while they do backbreaking work to produce food for everybody they are forced to drink dirty water, live without electricity, live with threats of evictions, survive on poverty wages and suffer abuse at the hands of bosses. The Speak-Out Campaign aims to bring an end to the oppression and exploitation of farm workers and

farm dwellers by coming together to build solidarity, strength and hope amongst the rural working class.

The foundation of any working class struggle is solidarity. We need to make real the slogan **'an injury to one is an injury to all'**. We call on international organizations of and for the working class to stand in solidarity with workers in South Africa. In order to serve, defend and build self-organisation amongst rural workers:

- Solidarity funds are required for transport costs in order to mobilize on the farms and bring workers together to participate in mass meetings and congresses.
- The bosses use the courts to drain the union of finances and intimidate workers. Willie Dreyer, the farmer of Leeuwenkuil farm outside Cape Town, has laid false charges of attempted murder and assault against two farm workers and CSAAWU's assistant General Secretary respectively. Solidarity funds are required for legal assistance.
- Find out if you/workers in your organisation pack, transport, sell or serve South Africa wine and fruit. Send protest letters against the abuse and exploitation of farm workers. If bosses continue to attack workers and their organisation, we will call for an international boycott against the products they sell. No worker should handle products that have workers' blood on them.

Yours in solidarity,
Trevor Christians
CSAAWU General Secretary

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

FOR A RURAL LAND FREE FROM HUNGER AND POVERTY!



For more information contact CSAAWU at csaawutav@gmail.com; phone +27835462911.
To make solidarity donations to CSAAWU: Bank: Standard Bank; Account number: 072003596;
Account name: CSAAWU; Branch name: Tyger Manor; Branch code: 050410; Swift Code: SBZAJJ