



Phone: +(679) 666 0746

Fax: +(679) 666 8766

**Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union**

**29<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

**Press Release**

**Sugar Workers Vote To Strike**

Workers in the sugar industry have sent a clear message to the authorities that the days of intimidation and threats are over. Workers in the industry have seen a decline in real wage by more than 40% over the last seven years. All these workers earn below the poverty line and a great number live in extreme poverty with no employment or income for periods of six to eight months each year.

The FSG&WU Union has over the period attempted to understand the financial difficulties the Corporation faced; much of it was self-inflicted with mismanagement. For the last two years the Union has consistently attempted to negotiate and urge the Corporation to consider a wage adjustment, let alone an increase. The Corporation has refused to enter into any negotiations and has publicly stated that it would not talk to the Union. This is a clear breach of the provisions of the Employment Relations Promulgation on Good Faith bargaining. Yet this government and the Attorney-General, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum continue to blame the Union for attempting to do its legitimate duty to ensure workers are paid fair and decent wages. The industry cannot ride on the workers' backs alone.

Last week the Union held secret ballots in all its members' workplaces for strike action in compliance with the ERP. FSC management held meetings and threatened workers not to participate in the vote telling members that government would be told of those that participate. Police and military officers were at all polling stations, again to intimidate workers. At some stations police attempted to direct workers and Union staff on the conduct of the ballots. Despite the intimidation and threats, 67.5% of the membership voted, of which 90% voted in favor of strike action. This fulfills the legal requirement for strike action. The National Executive Committee of the Union will now

decide on the next course of action. Workers will not accept any bullying by management or the authorities any longer. Enough is enough.

The A-G's threat that the mill will continue to operate irrespective of the workers decision is regrettable. Fiji needs to sell its sugar to the international community if the industry is to remain viable. This will not be possible without the A-G respecting workers' rights and indeed appreciating their plight. Workers cannot make ends meet and put decent food on the table. These are families with children who are being denied a decent living.

Felix Anthony

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Felix Anthony', with a stylized, cursive script.

FSG&WU General Secretary