

14th August, 2013

Press Release

SUGAR WORKERS CALL FOR DIALOGUE

The Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union is now contemplating strike action after the results have been finally validated by the Ministry of Labour. FSC has not responded to the Union's calls for talks.

Workers in FSC have gone without a wage adjustment for seven straight years and repeated calls for wage adjustment has only resulted in a 5.3 percent wages adjustment offer (approx. \$1.30 per day) when real wage during that period has declined by more than 40 percent. These are workers who earn the least in FSC and are unable to make ends meet. In fact these workers cannot put decent food on the table for their families let alone meet other necessities. Most of these workers are in debt and are unable to fulfill their commitments. Workers who work mostly during the crushing season only or on a casual basis are worse off. These workers have remained patient for a very long time and it is no longer bearable for them as they slip deeper into poverty.

The Sugar Permanent Secretary, Manasa Vaniqi's comments were unfortunate when he demanded to know where the Union was when FSC was facing problems. The answer is known to him. The Military was beating up Union Executives and bullying workers in mills at the time. In any case, the Unions were never invited to any industry meeting as if workers did not matter then. Workers seem to matter now when he and others are chalking up people's emotions with implications of the industry suffering if workers do not stop their demands for a decent wage. The Permanent Secretary must tell the nation who was responsible for the mess FSC found itself in. Certainly it was not the workers and it is unfair that workers have to bear all the consequences of the mess up. I remind the Permanent Secretary that these are real people and families we are representing and concerned for. It is also his responsibility to ensure that workers in the industry are treated with some decency and live and work with dignity.

The Union has also lodged a criminal negligence complaint with the Director of Criminal Investigations over the recent death of its member, Samuela Sigatokacake. Again, we see the Police's disinterest with not even a sign of preliminary investigations carried out. FSC can with impunity act in a negligent manner endangering lives of workers and carry on as if all is good. I call on the Police Commissioner to act on the complaint without delay. Surely, if the Unions were on

the wrong side of the law, the Police would not hesitate to act, even without a complaint.

The Sugar Workers have received international support for their claim to decent wages and conditions of work. This makes our determination stronger. The Executives will shortly take a decision on the way forward. In the meantime the Union remains prepared to negotiate.

FELIX ANTHONY

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Felix Anthony', with a stylized flourish at the end.

FSGWU GENERAL SECRETARY