

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

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4th July 2000

LAGOS STRIKE NEXT STEPS

The entire members of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) commends Lagos State civil

servants, including local government employees, for their doggedness in their continued struggle for the implementation of the new minimum wage of N7,500 across the board for all categories of civil servants in the state.

The struggle has been carried out in spite of government's false propaganda, threats and the resort to the use of strong arm tactics like kangaroo court orders, dispersing peaceful protests of workers through the use of teargas and live bullets against the workers, etc. Above all, the fact that workers have been able to continue with the strike in spite of the fact that they have not been paid their salary for the month of June is a pointer to the fact that workers are determined to ensure that they get their normal pay parity with their federal counterparts.

THE INTERVENTION OF CONCILIATORS

Our attention has also been drawn to the attempt by some individuals to mediate between the union and the government in an attempt to break the impasse. Of particular note is the intervention of comrade Frank Kokori, the immediate past General Secretary of NUPENG who was incarcerated by the Abacha regime for almost four years because of his role in the struggle to actualize the June 12 mandate.

While we commend his past role of leading the workers' struggle which eventually led to his arrest and detention in August 1994, we cannot totally say the same for his present intervention in the ongoing strike of the Lagos State workers. The demand that both workers and government must be prepared to make concessions in a bid to resolve the ongoing impasse does not take account of the fact that what the workers are demanding is the implementation of pay parity with the federal civil servants which has been in practice before the advent of the regime of Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

It is equally wrong to give the impression that a capitalist government and workers are "partners-in-progress". Nothing could be further from the truth. It is always the ambition of the capitalist rich few to become fabulously rich, while keeping the working masses as poorly paid as possible. This explains why in spite of the stupendous wealth at the disposal of the Lagos State government, it is still bent on denying the workers their rightful minimum wage of N7,500 per month

which is nothing but a poverty wage by Lagos standard. Kokori's concern to prevent the return of the military is absolutely correct. It is however wrong to assume that this can be achieved through a strategy which seeks to make the capitalist governments, at central and state levels, serve the interests of the people.

Given the selfish character of capitalism, this is nothing but an impossibility. Rather, what Kokori and other labour leaders should be doing now is the creation of a genuine working people's party which will commence in earnest the struggle to wrestle powers from capitalist civilian mis-rule without giving an inch to any military adventurism.

ABILITY TO PAY

Up till the time of going to the press, the government has not challenged the statement credited to Phillip Asiodu (chief economic adviser to the federal government) that Lagos State government has received up to N16 billion for the first half of the year, which is about N2.7 billion every month since January as the federal allocation to the state. This amount excludes the internally generated revenues of the state government. This fact contradicts the impression being created by the Lagos State government that it cannot afford the payment of N7,500 minimum wage across the board to its public servants.

In reality, the state government needs just about N1 billion monthly to pay the new N7,500 minimum wage. The state government's claim that it needs N1.7 billion to implement the new wage is over-inflated and has been correctly faulted by the Council of Industrial Unions (COIU). The cost of living index (CLI) of Lagos state is not comparable to any part of the country including Abuja the federal capital. The high cost of rent, feeding, transportation, etc underscores the need for Lagos state public servants to earn even more than N7,500 minimum wage across the board.

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) has as far back as 1997 been demanding for the sum of N20,000 as minimum wage for workers in Nigeria. This amount is only to meet the standard of 1981 minimum wage but even the peanut of N7,500 minimum wage is still been denied the Lagos state workers in year 2000.

JUMBO PAY TO POLITICAL OFFICE HOLDERS

The jumbo salaries and allowances to political office holders reinforce our belief that if the government gets its priority right, it can easily pay decent wages to the workers. While the government has been wasting the state's resources in needless propaganda that it cannot afford to pay the N7,500 minimum wage to its public servants, it has found it convenient to pay the following salaries to the political holders. (See table).

The figures stated do not include allowances such as transport, meal subsidy, utility and entertainment allowances. In addition, each of these office holders are entitled to either two or four domestic servants on GL 03, all paid for by the state government.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE ?

There is the compelling need to produce leaflets, posters and to organise rallies, mass protests and demonstrations to public places, markets and city centres to conscientise the populace about the demands of the workers. This has become necessary to be able to combat the massive propaganda by the governments in both the print and electronic media that are owned and controlled by the members of their class (the capitalist ruling elite).

EMERGENCY SERVICES

There is also the need to provide skeletal emergency services in areas such as hospitals and a few other vital areas like water and refuse disposal services on specific days of the week in order to alleviate the sufferings of the populace. These emergency services are geared towards ensuring that the workers do not lose public sympathy for the strike. For it to be effective it must be under the control of the unions or a committee set up by the unions themselves.

It must be stressed that these emergency services, rather than leading to the collapse of the strike, will further endear the striking workers to the populace if properly managed and controlled. The skeletal services to be provided in the hospitals will include attending to serious accident victims, complicated cases of expectant mothers and very sick children.

FOR A NATIONALLY-COORDINATED ACTION

As at the time of going to the press, civil servants in at least five states (Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Borno, Niger) have embarked on strike over the issue of minimum wage while civil servants in some other states are gearing up for industrial action over the same issue. On the other hand, state governors, at a meeting in Abuja on Monday, 3rd July, 2000, insisted they would not pay more than N5,500 as minimum wage.

This situation makes necessary for the labour movement to organise a nationally-coordinated mass actions on the issue of minimum wage. This would put together the entire strength of the workers' movement nationally and put maximum pressure to bear on the federal and state governments instead of leaving workers in individual states and industries to fight alone.

Towards this end, we call on the COIU and NLC leaders in Lagos State to, as a matter of urgency, reach out to labour unions in other states to work out a programme of joint action. The national leadership of the NLC also needs to act immediately by calling a meeting of all state councils and industrial unions with the goal of organising a nation-wide action. It is only this united, collective approach that can secure quick victory for workers in the current struggle over the minimum wage.

LESSONS OF THE STRIKE

An important lesson to be drawn on this workers strike is the fact that no wage increase has ever been given on a platter of gold to the workers. They had always have to struggle for any increase. It should also be noted that any increase that is granted by the capitalist through the right hand would be taken by the left hand through other means like deregulation of prices of petroleum and electricity, privatisation and commercialisation of public utilities and companies, trade liberalisation, devaluation of the currency and even retrenchment of workers.

The Lagos State public servants should note the gang up of all the state governments to deprive their workers the right minimum wage. The governors from the three political parties - AD, PDP and APP - are all conspiring to deprive state civil servants across the country their rightful minimum wage because they all share the same capitalist orientation.

This raises the need to form a political alternative to all these parties, as they are all incapable of fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the ordinary masses of the country. This is why the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) has been at the forefront of calling for the working people and other poor masses to come together to form a working peoples' party to meet the aspirations of the Nigerian masses.

Lastly, it is very important to note that it is only the socialist transformation of the society and the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under the democratic control of the working class will bring the required lasting succour to the working masses of the country and no amount of tinkering of the present capitalist economy will alleviate the mass poverty and misery in which the working masses are forced to live.

SYMPOSIUM

LESSONS OF LAGOS STATE MINIMUM WAGE STRUGGLE

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) invites you to a symposium to discuss and draw the lessons of the on-going struggle of Lagos State civil servants for N7,500 monthly minimum wage.

DATE:

Saturday, 8th July, 2000

TIME:

11 am.

VENUE:

DSM Secretariat, 162, Ipaja Road, Agbotikuyo Bus Stop, Agege, Lagos.

INVITED SPEAKERS:

Ayodele Akele (Chairman, COIU, Lagos State)

Adams Oshiomhole (President, NLC)

Segun Sango (General Secretary, DSM)

Albert Ogunlana (General Secretary, Campaign for Independent Unionism)

Femi Kolawole (Coordinator, NANS Zone D)

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