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Victory for worker solidarity

- Pays - Afrique du Sud -

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Libération Afrique

The Congress of South African Trade Union is pleased to announce that its members, dock workers belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) achieved a victory last night when they stood firm by their decision not to offload the Johanna Russ, a ship that was carrying Israeli goods to South Africa. This, despite threats to COSATU members from sections of the pro-Israeli lobby, and despite severe provocation.

The Johanna Russ, flying an Antigua flag, is owned by M. Dizengoff and Co., an established "pioneer of the modern era of shipping business in the Middle East" and shipping agent for the ironically named Zim Israel Navigation Company. (Ironic because, last year, the same SATAWU members refused to offload the Chinese ship An Yue Jiang, which was carrying arms and ammunition destined for Robert Mugabe's army.)

The worker action last night took place despite attempted subterfuge on the part of the owners of the shipping company. There was an attempt to confound the plan by arriving earlier than originally scheduled, which was 8 February. Dates for the berthing of the Johanna Russ were changed constantly. Yesterday morning, SATAWU members were told that the ship would dock this morning (Friday) at 02:00. Thanks to the vigilance of the dock workers, SATAWU discovered that the ship had docked on Wednesday morning and was due to be offloaded last night at 21:00. But the vigilant workers were on guard and immediately they realised that it had docked, they then refused to handle it, despite pressures from management. SATAWU members maintained their refusal to offload the ship and also attempted to ensure that scab labour would not be used.

A few hours after berthing, at 23:00, the Johanna Russ sneaked out of the Durban Harbour.

From the beginning of this action, COSATU workers remained resolute about their position and were convinced that, following the recent Israeli massacres in Gaza, they will take determined action against Israel. Israel's terror included flagrant breaches of international law, the bombing of densely populated neighbourhoods, the illegal deployment of chemical white phosphorous, and attacks on schools, ambulances, relief agencies, hospitals, universities and places of worship.

COSATU has now decided to intensify its efforts in support of the struggles of the Palestinian people. The worker victory in Durban yesterday spurs COSATU members on to more determined action in order to isolate the Apartheid state of Israel. Other Cosatu unions are currently in discussion about how they might also give effect to Cosatu resolutions on boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, including a refusal to handle Israeli goods, and continuing pressure on our government to sever diplomatic and trade relations with Israel.

The momentum against apartheid Israel has become an irresistible force. We are proud to stand with the millions around the world who say 'Enough is enough'. They are doing what we asked them to do when we faced the apartheid regime in our own country.

COSATU and the PSC call on all people of conscience to join us in boycotting Israeli products and institutions until a just, democratic state, with equal rights for all comes into existence in Palestine. This is just the beginning of a solidarity campaign which will continue until the demands of the Palestinian people have been won.

Post-scriptum :For more information, call:

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